THE POST-GAME:
RETROSPECTIVES OF THE EXPERIENCES OF CANADIAN BLACK STUDENT-ATHLETES ON US ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIPS

Desmond Miller

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Abstract

The dream of playing basketball in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) on an athletic scholarship is shared by many youth, particularly Black youth, across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). However, for Canadian Black youth who "go south" (i.e. to the U.S.A.) and return to Canada, their stories are not reported in the same way or do not become as well publicized compared to the publicity before they received athletic scholarships. In this research, I explore and describe the ways in which seven Canadian Black male youth understand and make meaning of their experiences of having pursued and accepted athletic scholarships to play basketball in U.S. post-secondary institutions and having returned to Canada. Critical Race Theory and Bourdieu's theory of distinction provide the framework for my analysis.

Following the life experiences of participants, this thesis is divided into three interrelated sections: The Pre-Game: Pursuing the Scholarship; Game Time: Life as a College Athlete in the United States and; The Post-Game: Coming Back to Canada. The combination of devotion to developing their athletic and academic abilities, and being in the "right" environment, surrounded by a large network of supporters, contributed to their successful attainment of US athletic scholarships. At university, participants gained more than an academic education, learning about the business side of athletics and how to successfully manage several competing demands (academic, athletic and social) leading them to ultimately growing and mature as individuals. Following university graduation, it appeared that a variety of factors related to personal aspirations, and resources (e.g. social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital) were taken into account by participants, leading them to pursue professional careers working with youth or continuing to play basketball professionally. In discussing questions of race, class and gender, I note some implications of this research for students, parents, educators, coaches and educational institutions.

Dedication

For Eunice

Acknowledgements

There are many people who, in various ways, contributed to the realization of this project and to whom I would like to say "thanks":

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Introduction

> ...I think a lot of kids need to read this [research] because, now that you have Tristan Thompson, Corey Joseph, [Andrew] Wiggins is gonna be in The League, Anthony Bennett[1], they think now, I'm just gonna walk and go to the NBA, not knowing all these doors been opened cause all these guys ahead of them was what opened the doors. Before those times, guys weren't even seen as equal – just cause you're Canadian. Doors had to be broken down; like we had to break those doors down, the hard way. We had to pay the dues for that. ... I want kids to read this so they know [pursuing a scholarship] is not just a walk in the park. It's way more. You gotta apply yourself, too. NBA's always your last goal. But before the NBA, you gotta be able to do college – on and off the floor; in the classroom and on the court. You're not prepared for that, stay home; save your parents some tears, stay home. If you're not built for that life, stay home. Don't even waste nobody's time. You think you're gonna come [to the US] it's gonna be like *Saved By the Bell: College Years*? Pshht. Stay home. It'll eat you alive.
>
> - Kofi

I do not know if I could have asked for better words to frame this project, than the ones provided here by one of the participants. Following our interview, I explained my own life trajectory, the path I took to this project and some of my reasons for wanting to interview people with experiences similar to his. The above quote was his response. Having pursued it myself, I am interested in exploring a dream shared by many youth, particularly Black youth, across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA); it is the dream of going to the States (i.e. USA) to play basketball on an athletic scholarship. Recent media coverage of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA[2]) Division I men's

[1] The people mentioned are all young Black males from the GTA. The first two, Thompson and Joseph, are currently playing in the NBA while Bennett was the number 1 pick in the 2013 NBA draft and Wiggins is projected to be the number 1 pick in the 2014 NBA draft.

[2] The NCAA is the major overseeing body that governs interuniversity sport – including colleges and universities – in the United States. Colleges and universities fall into various divisions (I, II and III) based on their enrolment, playing schedule, athletic funding provided and accordingly the number of sports teams they are able to field for both men and women (NCAA 2013; NCAA Eligibility Center 2013). Division I is considered to be the highest level of competition, but in practice, the level of competition may be comparable between mid-to-low Division I and high Division II schools.

basketball national championship tournament (a.k.a "March Madness") has highlighted the amount, and quality, of Canadians now fulfilling this dream, making significant contributions to varsity basketball teams at American colleges and universities[3].

As I write this thesis, and as the above quote suggests, Canadian basketball players are generating more buzz and garnering greater attention across North America than perhaps any other time in recent history (Ballingall 2013; Canadian Press 2013; Jones 2013; Livingstone 2013; 2013a; TSN 2013). For the third consecutive year, several Canadians were first-round or second-round picks in the National Basketball Association (NBA)[4] draft and, in 2013, Anthony Bennett became the first ever person from Canada (and the GTA) to be drafted first overall (Kelly 2013). Lastly, high-schooler Andrew Wiggins – the first Canadian to win the Gatorade National Player of the Year award for best U.S. high school player[5] (Taylor 2013) – has been projected as a virtual lock to be selected as the number one pick in the 2014 NBA Draft (Chick 2013; Ewing 2013; Kelly 2013; 2013a).

Such feats have not always been the norm for Canadian basketball players. The current trend of Canadian youth winning US basketball scholarships has become increasingly normal compared to previous decades. Some Canadian youth "go south"

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[3] The terms 'college' and 'university' are used interchangeably throughout the text to refer to American post-secondary institutions.
[4] The NBA is the preeminent professional basketball league in the world with most teams based in the United States of America.
[5] Wiggins plays for Huntington Prep School in Huntington, West Virginia.

sooner to American prep schools[6], in an effort to improve their chances of winning an athletic scholarship and, ultimately, punch their ticket to the NBA (CBC 2012; Grange 2010; Grange 2010a; Hall 2012; James, Tecle & Miller 2013). However, up until about the mid to late 2000's, the path to attaining a US athletic scholarship was less clear, and scholarships were much harder to come by for Canadian youth. Additionally, as participants in this project propose, even those who did win athletic scholarships often faced the challenge of not being considered up-to-par athletically with their American counterparts.

My own experience of pursuing a scholarship began at a young age. Though I played house league and club basketball from about the ages of seven and ten respectively, it wasn't until around age twelve that my sights were really set on the US, and winning an athletic scholarship. I was recognized for my skill at a camp, and invited by a coach to travel, with a contingent of youth from the GTA, to a basketball camp hosted by a perennial NCAA Division I powerhouse. Although it would not be my last, my first trip to the United States was one that I would not soon forget.

Besides the excitement of my first trip south of the 49th parallel, the camp itself was incredible. I vividly remember the wide-open university campus: athletic facilities were abundant and well maintained, the cafeteria served good food and staying in the dorms gave us a taste of what life away from home could be (although we were told that the team house, reserved for the varsity basketball players, was top choice). I was sold.

[6] Prep school basketball programs, which are affiliated with high schools, promise elite-level competition, and exposure to scouts for high school athletes.

Everything about my time at that basketball camp had me believe that the life of a college athlete was 'it' and seemingly luxurious. And attending a big-time Division I (DI) school would improve my chances of making it to The League (i.e. NBA)[7]. What could be better than playing the game that you love for a living?

It was this experience that captured my imagination and desires to play basketball at a DI school in the US. At the time, I was unsure of the cost of university but certainly did not want to pay if I did not have to. So, I set my mind to pursuing the goal of winning an athletic scholarship. While winning a "free" education would be an added benefit, like many of my colleagues north of the border, I pursued the dream of going south of the border with a professional sports career in the NBA as the end goal. The many proposed benefits – for both participants and society – often associated with sport allowed me to receive encouragement from peers, teachers, coaches and my parents for my sport participation. I devoted the majority of my non-academic time to the dream of "going south".

As I matured and went through high school, stories of Black youth who would "go south" on athletic scholarships were circulated widely via various media outlets. Some elite youth basketball programs[8] in the GTA even kept a running tally on their websites of athletes who won scholarships to the United States – including a few who made it to the NBA. This knowledge provided encouragement for me; if others from the

[7] Several college athletes who played on that university's men's basketball team at the same time I attended their summer camp subsequently played in the NBA.
[8] Examples include: Grassroots Canada Basketball, Scarborough Basketball Association and Phase1 Basketball.

GTA could make it, then I could, too. At the time, post-secondary institutions participating in Canadian Interuniversity Sport[9] (CIS) were generally considered inferior in terms of competition and resources available and therefore rarely, if ever, sought after as a first option by anyone who was serious about going to the States on an athletic scholarship. It was presumed that the best resources and competition are available in the United States so that was best place to go.

Nearing the end of my high school career, my dream of "going south" began to fade as reality set in. The lack of scouting letters being sent my way meant chances of making it were slim to none. However, in part because I also aspired to also win an academic scholarship, my grades were good enough to gain admission into, and attend, a Canadian post-secondary institution. I pursued a degree in Physical and Health Education and turned my athletic focus towards varsity track and field. Meanwhile, stories of youth (mostly Black) from the GTA going to the United States on basketball scholarships continued to circulate (Grange 2010; Grossman 2005; 2006; 2008; Leong 2008) and even seemed to increase. At times, during my undergraduate career, I wondered what happened to the youth who were able to achieve the dream of "going south". Statistically speaking, there are not enough places on teams in the NBA[10], for everyone to "go pro", so most athletes would have to figure out something else, but what?

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[9] The CIS is the major governing body for interuniversity varsity sport competition in Canada. Unlike the NCAA, the CIS is not separated into divisions and only governs university competition and a separate organization, the Canadian College Athletic Association (CCAA) governs varsity competition for colleges in Canada.

[10] As of 2013 NBA teams are allowed an active roster of 12 players (NBA.com 2001). With 30 teams in the NBA, at any one time there could be at least 360 roster openings – yet only 60 new players are drafted each

Once Canadian Black high school athletes[11] have "gone south" and returned to Canada, their stories, in the literature and media, were (and still are) not as well known or reported in the same way as prior to them receiving athletic scholarships. The same organizations that touted developing US scholarship athletes, lack a similar "where are they now?" list on their websites, detailing the careers and lives that former US scholarship athletes currently enjoy outside of basketball. Little, if any, reference is made to what I have called in my title "the post-game".

There is also limited research which covers the experiences of Canadian athletes, either on athletic scholarships in the US or when they have returned to Canada[12]. This gap in information is significant considering the push and pull to reach this dream, publicity for those who achieve it, and little (Zacharias 2006) to no similar follow-up. From my knowledge, a number of Canadian Black college athletes return to Canada, some within a year, and without completing their degrees – a little documented phenomenon on which National media outlets are just beginning to pick up (see the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (2012) *The Fifth Estate:* Fast Break). It was this knowledge that led me to this research and to ask the question: How do Canadian Black male youth understand and make meaning of their experiences as athletic scholarship

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year. The most recent statistics on the NCAA (2013) website lists 9784 college athletes participating in Division I and II men's basketball alone during the 2009-10 season.

[11] I make limited use of the term "student-athlete" because, as others have noted (Branch 2011; Eitzen 2009; Staurowsky & Sack 2005; Wells 2009) it has been deployed in various ways to mask the employee-employer-like relationship between college students and universities in the NCAA and thus take advantage of outdated ideals of 'amateurism' to avoid paying college athletes for their labour.

[12] Notable exceptions include Carle (1999), Gilgunn (2007) and Wells (2009).

winners who have played basketball in, and graduated from, U.S. post-secondary institutions?

To explore this question I took a phenomenological approach. In Chapter 3 I explain phenomenology in greater detail, but suffice it to say that the goal of using this methodology is to describe in detail "the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell 2007, p. 57, emphasis original). Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological research is to explore and describe the ways in which Canadian Black male youth understand and make meaning of their experiences of having pursued and accepted athletic scholarships to play basketball in USA post-secondary institutions. Other related questions in this study include: how do Canadian Black male youth think of using athletics to achieve their academic, athletic and career aspirations? What happens to Canadian Black male youth, who are heavily invested in athletics, when their goals do not materialize? What role do Canadian Black male youth believe factors such as race, class, gender, and cultural capital play in their life chances and means of achieving individually defined success?

Significance

This exploratory research is significant in two ways. First, it identifies factors that Canadian Black male youth think contributed to their drive to pursue the goal of "going south", their return to Canada, and their current situation. Including the perspectives and voices of youth who have "gone south" and then returned adds a dimension to the discussion on these youth that is not often heard, thus contributing to a fuller

understanding of this phenomenon. The social location of the participants (in terms of race, class, gender), and the life chances they are likely to experience, makes this research particularly important. The insights gleaned from my research will be valuable for coaches, educators, parents and students in understanding the experiences of youth who "go south" and return to Canada.

Second, this project serves to address gaps in current research, which focus largely on the experiences of American athletes in the NCAA (Adler & Adler 1991; Martin et al. 2010; Singer 2008) and, to a lesser degree, the experiences of Canadian athletes in the NCAA (Carle 1999; Gilgunn 2007; Wells 2009) and CIS (Miller & Kerr 2002; Wells 2009). The research conducted in this study adds to the small body of literature about experiences of Canadian youth who have participated in elite college athletics in the United States.

The significance of sport, education and race, and their implications for the career aspirations of youth, are of interest to me in part due to my own career trajectory. As mentioned above, my life-path mirrors a portion of the lives of the youth I interviewed. My colleagues, many of whom are racialized young men, also pursued the dream of playing on a basketball scholarship in the US, and experienced varying outcomes. My interest in conducting this research stems from a desire to produce a more complex, perhaps fulsome, description of the potential consequences of pursuing this dream – and of the individuals who pursue it – than what is often (re)presented in popular discourses.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

In order to provide background information, which would guide my research, I conducted a literature review following the seven tasks outlined by Fink (2005). The exact steps I took are outlined in detail in Appendix A. My initial search produced limited results (13 references), leading me to solicit advice from colleagues and my supervisor, Prof. Carl James, who has extensive experience as a researcher and sociologist at the intersections of race, youth, education and sport (James 2003; 2005; 2010; 2012). After scrutinizing handpicked sources, taken from reference lists of sources resulting from my initial search, literature was selected based on relevance to concepts in my research question[13]. Sources were included if they referred generally to college athletes in the NCAA and Canadian experiences in the NCAA in particular. Literature that focused specifically on female experiences was excluded.

Based on these searches I identified three key areas: (1) the experiences of college athletes in the NCAA, (2) the experiences of Canadian athletes in the NCAA and the meanings that US scholarships hold for them, and (3) the role of factors such as race, class and gender in the aspirations of Canadian high school athletes to win US athletic scholarships. These areas are explored further in what follows.

[13] How do Canadian Black male youth understand and make meaning of their experiences of having pursued and accepted athletic scholarships to play basketball in USA post-secondary institutions?

One area of study, which has received much critical attention in the sociology of sport[14] is that of elite US college sport – leading to the development of a significant body of research on the subject (Eitzen 1989; 2009; Hawkins 1999; Kahn 2007; Lapchick et al., 2009; Singer 2008; Sperber 1990; Staurowsky & Sack 1988; 2005). Among this research, Adler and Adler (1991) stand out for their seminal work using ethnographic methods to study a Division I NCAA men's basketball team over a five-year period. The result of their participant-observation research is a detailed, in-depth "inside look" into the day-to-day, inner workings of an elite college basketball program, and the experiences of the individuals involved in it.

Adler and Adler (1991) find that players on the team generally fell into several different categories or "cliques". These social groups were related to their level of "heart" (bravery, dedication, willingness to make sacrifices for the team), as well as their race and class (see pp. 32-38). More central to their findings was the identification of similar roles which all of the participants held: academic, social and athletic. Balancing these competing and conflicting roles is described as a significant challenge for participants as they navigated their post-secondary career.

The authors explain that many of the athletes entered college focused on acquiring a college education and taking complete advantage of all the diverse educational opportunities a post-secondary institution is said to offer. However, with time and

[14] The sociology of sport emerged as a discipline in physical education during the 1960s due to a variety of events both in the broader society and higher education in particular (Sage 1997 p. 325). With roots in sociology and physical education dating back to the mid-19th century, sociology of sport has since shifted from its more positivistic foundation in the 1960's to taking a more critical stance on the structures of society in which sport is embedded (Sage 1997).

increasing athletic commitments on and off the court (e.g. meeting boosters and alumni) associated with the evolving basketball season, the athletic role was assumed as primary and predominating. The term the authors suggested for this phenomenon, "role engulfment", resulted in, among other things, compromised academic performance for most (p. 189) and failure to graduate for approximately half of the participants (p. 190). Since this study, similar (though less in-depth) research has been conducted in a Canadian University context, exploring the various roles occupied by Canadian student-athletes (see Miller & Kerr 2002). Nevertheless, the experiences of Canadian athletes in US colleges, and the meanings US athletic scholarships hold for them, rarely receive attention in research literature. My work will add to these areas of research, to which I turn next.

A commonly held belief by Canadian youth with US athletic scholarship aspirations is that the best opportunities (e.g. better competition, access to scouts, financial resources, training facilities) lay at US, not Canadian, universities (Gilgunn 2007; James 2003; 2005; James, Tecle & Miller 2013; Wells 2009). These proposed features of US colleges are especially attractive for youth with professional athletic aspirations, who play sports that stream from the NCAA into a professional league (i.e. the NBA or NFL); not to mention the caché that comes with the status of being a "scholarship winner" (see Wells 2009). Following this logic, one would expect that a large proportion of Canadian high school athletes would seek an opportunity to play in the United States.

Wells (2009) explores the experiences of Canadian US athletic scholarship recipients – some of whom completed their scholarships and others who did not and subsequently returned to Canada. Using the most recent available NCAA data, Wells (2009) reports that about 2500 Canadian Athletes participate in the NCAA, and make up the largest group of international recruits at 28.4% (p. 16). While this NCAA data has not been updated since 1996, some estimate the number of Canadians heading to the NCAA each year on athletic scholarships is approximately 1000 (Christie 2012). Despite this, the chances of American high school athletes making it to the NCAA to play men's basketball are slim at 3.3% (NCAA 2012). The odds of going from the NCAA to the NBA look even slimmer for US male high schools athletes at 1.3%, leading some to remark that athletes and their parents are about as likely to win the lottery (ABC 2013). And, even though there are no good statistics of the probability that Canadians might win an athletic scholarship, the dream of "going south" on athletic scholarships remains paramount for many Canadian Black youth (James 2003; 2005). I would argue the dream seems even more attainable in light of the two GTA Black youth being first-round selections in the 2011 NBA draft (Smith, 2011)[15], three more Canadian Black males being drafted in 2012 (Tsumura 2012), and Anthony Bennett becoming the first Canadian drafted first overall (Kelly 2013).

[15] Tristan Thompson from Brampton, Ontario was drafted at number 4. Corey Joseph, a teammate of Thompson's at the University of Texas, was also drafted in the first-round at number 29. This event marked the first time since 1983 two Canadian players were drafted to the NBA in the first round (Basketball Canada 2013)

Wells' (2009) research provides a window into some of the reasons why the dream of winning a US athletic scholarship persists. She notes that for her participants who competed in track and field, a 'non-revenue' sport, there was no professional proverbial "light" at the end of the college "tunnel" to account for their intense dedication to winning and holding a US athletic scholarship. Her participants were mainly from upper and middle class backgrounds, and thus the financial drive to win an athletic scholarship was less significant; they could still afford to attend college or university without an athletic scholarship. Wells (2009) posits that, for her participants, the desire to win a "full-ride" US athletic scholarship is largely symbolic and seen as a marker of prestige, a stance supported by others (Dyck 2011; Gilgunn 2007). Yet, in concluding, she notes that further research should look at the specific experiences of varying "ethnoracial groups", particularly Canadian Black youth, as laid out in the work of James (2005) (Wells 2009, p. 93). My research begins to address this gap.

Research points to the pivotal role athletics plays in the lives of Black youth, and how dimensions such as race, class and gender intersect and add to the barriers they experience (Singer & Buford May 2011; James 2005; Eitle and Eitle 2002). Minority and working class students are disadvantaged in educational institutions that privilege academic abilities, skills and knowledge (i.e. 'cultural capital'; see Bourdieu 1977) "informed by middle-class Eurocentric principles" and reward merit on this basis (James 2010 p. 451). Challenging common approaches to education which see racialized and working class students as bereft of cultural capital, Yosso (2005) argues that such

students possess particular kinds of cultural and social capital, or as she refers to it, "community cultural wealth". However, this social and cultural capital is unlikely to be recognized in educational institutions, presenting a hurdle for some working class and minority youth, and thus limiting their access to the kinds of cultural capital most widely valued in society – capital that would improve their chances of achieving upward social mobility (Yosso 2005).

In GTA schools, Black youth are often represented as underachievers. Frequently quoted statistics in the local media that reference high secondary school dropout rates (Brown 2008, Brown & Popplewell 2008: CBC 2011) contribute to negative perceptions of Black youth. The circulation of negative stereotypes about Black students mask the discrimination they face in schools, not to mention Eurocentric curricula that serve to challenge the educational success of non-white students (Dei & James 1998, James 2012). Additionally, the ability of some racialized students to thrive academically in such environments may be referred to by peers as being "whitewashed" or "acting white" (i.e. not Black) – a form of ostracism or teasing (see George forthcoming) which may increase anxiety (Murray et al. 2012). In this context, racialized students can encounter a harsh school setting and face the challenge of finding creative ways to make their schooling experiences successful, or at the very least tolerable.

One strategy some Black students can employ to acquire the cultural and social capital that would help them achieve social mobility is to use those assets already available to them. One such asset is their perceived athletic ability. Stereotypes about

Black males as naturally athletically gifted are based largely on the pervasive images of African-American and Black males in the media who gain success through sport (Azzarito & Harrison 2008; Beamon 2010; Harrison & Lawrence 2004; Wilson & Sparks 1999). Coaches, teachers and other school officials, influenced by such stereotypes, may advantage Black high school athletes, providing them greater support for their athletic, rather than academic, endeavours (James 2005; 2010). In turn the students are able to gain social and cultural capital through sport. The caveat being that these benefits are limited if their dreams of winning a US athletic scholarships are not realized.

The social position and perceived life chances many Black youth experience lend to athletics becoming an all-consuming pursuit to the detriment of academics (Adler & Adler 1991). Investing in athletics over academics limits one's ability to accumulate the social and cultural capital most widely valued in society. With many Black youth receiving greater encouragement for athletic over academic endeavors and having negative schooling experiences (James 2009), it is understandable that they would want to pursue an athletic career. Furthermore, the prevalence of Black males garnering significant economic gains and attention through sport (Beamon 2010; Smith and Beal 2007; Wilson & Sparks 1999), in the absence of similar media exposure for Black males in other desirable careers: 1) influence young Black males to set their sights on an athletic career, and 2) believe it is a realistic, desirable and achievable goal.

The youth most likely to pursue athletics with the expectation that it will lead to an athletic scholarship and/or career in professional athletics are minority and working

class (Singer & Buford May 2011). And with few resources to rely on, the consequences of not attaining this goal are greater for working-class and minority youth. Furthermore, heavy investment in athletics over academics can reproduce social inequalities for marginalized individuals (Singer & Buford May 2011). My research provides a fuller account of the potential outcomes, for Canadian Black youth, of pursuing and attaining the goal of "going south". Information from the participants identifies their successes and challenges of pursuing this dream as well as strategies for navigating various outcomes.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework

To interpret the data gleaned from the interviews, I employ a combination of two theoretical frameworks: Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction, supplemented with Critical Race Theory. Together, these theories provide useful references in interpreting the research findings. They help to make sense of the experiences and meanings held by participants in relation to their social location as influenced by race, class, gender and other social demographic factors. In what follows, I outline the important elements in Bourdieu's theory, their definitions and his method of research. Next, I outline Critical Race Theory, and its use in adapting Bourdieu's general theory for a North American context. Lastly, I outline the application of these two theories to the phenomenon of study in this project.

To apply the theory of distinction conceptualized by Bourdieu (1984), it is first necessary to understand the conceptual tools with which he works. In Bourdieu's view, the world in which individuals live can be considered a social space. The social space is composed of an array of 'fields', which share some relation to each other (Mahar, Harker & Wilkes 1990, p. 9). These fields or 'fields of forces', which must be negotiated by individuals navigating the social space, privilege particular practices and knowledges. The various fields are composed of structures which converge with personal history (i.e. socialization) contributing to the formation of a "durable" – though not fixed – set of dispositions or propensities, habitus (Mahar, Harker & Wilkes 1990, p. 10). In turn,

habitus influences the perceptions (ways of understanding and making sense of things) individuals have of the world that are mediated by specific historical circumstances. Both habitus and perceptions of individuals impact the actions, or practices as Bourdieu calls them, that individuals engage in when navigating the field, ultimately having an effect back on the structures in the field (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

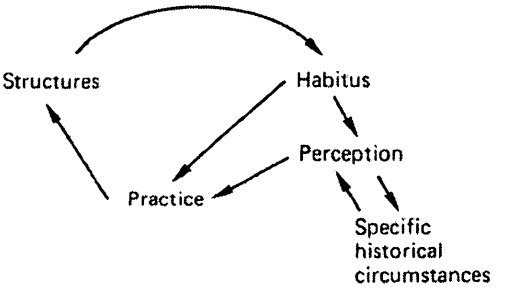

Figure 4.4 Reproduction and change

Note: From Harker (1990), *Bourdieu – Education and Reproduction* p. 101, fig. 4.4

It is important to emphasize here that Bourdieu views these relationships as dialectical rather than determining; the constant feedback loop between structures and social actors opens up the possibility for both social change and reproduction or maintenance of the status quo.

As the theory's title suggests, social location and ranking within the social space depends upon distinguishing between individuals. Bourdieu (1984) posits – using the metaphor of the market – that distinctions are made through the recognition of several forms of capital, namely economic, cultural, social and symbolic. Economic capital is

understood as monetary wealth; cultural capital is valued knowledge acquired through socialization, usually the family or school; and social capital refers to a network of other individuals to which one has more or less connection and upon which one may draw as resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant in Spaaj 2009, p.250; Grenfell 2009, p. 20). Symbolic capital, understood as prestige, status, or "style", is unique in that ultimately it is derived from other forms of capital. The strength of symbolic capital – and power associated with it – relies on, and is in fact only maintained by, being misrecognised as having a material basis (Mahar, Harker and Wilkes 1990, p. 5). As in any market, the value accorded to forms of capital is dependent upon scarcity or how rare an item is within a given field. And though all forms of capital are interconvertible (e.g. cultural capital such as formal education can be converted to economic capital and vice versa) not all forms of capital can be carried across to different fields with the same value (e.g. the skill of kicking a field goal in American football does not carry the same value in office work settings).

With these tools in mind, the final concepts, and perhaps most important to consider in Bourdieu's theory, are struggle, strategy and practice. Bourdieu contends that given the limited capital available in particular fields, there is ongoing struggle over capital. Therefore, individuals employ certain strategies and engage in practices to accumulate or avoid losing capital to improve or maintain their social position. The strategies behind these practices (one might also say mentality or mind-state), however are relatively unconscious to social actors, and are instead implicit or normal to the individuals who employ them, akin to 'the air they breathe'. I am reminded of Marshall

McLuhan's suggestion that it is unlikely that the fish would have discovered the water that surrounds it. In sum, the theory of distinction can be described succinctly using a game analogy:

> First, a sphere of play is an ordered universe in which not everything can happen. Entering the game implies a conscious or unconscious acceptance of the explicit and/or implicit rules of the game on the part of the players. These players must also possess a 'feel' for the game.... Such competence is shared unequally by players and determines their mastery of the game in proportion to their competence. On the subjective side of Bourdieu's dialectic, competence and mastery of the game are analogous to a person's habitus and capital as they exist within the field. (Mahar, Harker & Wilkes 1990, p. 7)

Altogether, these conceptual tools make up the theory of distinction or 'generative structuralism' as it is also called.

Finally, proponents of Bourdieu's theory, and Bourdieu himself, stress that the concepts he outlines are more of a working method than a set theory (see Harker 1990). Bourdieu's theorizing was always dialectical in that it was informed by empirical research, and reformulated through successive projects. Notably, the majority of this research was conducted in France and as a result bears the marks of its social structures, histories and emphasis on formal qualifications and accreditation. Therefore, rather than simply transplanting and applying the method, it needs to be worked and adapted to specific historical moments and contexts (Harker 1990, p. 99). To account for some of these specificities in this project, I turn to Critical Race Theory.

Figuring prominently in this discussion is the centrality of race in my analysis of the experiences of Canadian Black male US athletic scholarship winners. Therefore, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a useful framework for this research. CRT emerged in the

1980's from a break with American Critical Legal Studies (CLS) (Aylward 1999). CLS was initially attractive for its critique of the tenets of Legal Liberalism (legal determinancy, neutrality, abstraction, individual rights) but later drew criticism from some scholars due to its failure to critically consider the experiences of people of colour and the role of race in institutionalized oppression and the legal system (Aylward 1999, pp. 21-30). Seeing that some of the victories from the civil rights movement era became stagnant or overturned, critical scholars such as Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado among others sought new tools and strategies to struggle against forms of racism (Delgado & Stefancic 2012, p. 4; see also Aylward 1999, pp. 30-34). With influence from various other oppressed groups (e.g. Women, Native Americans and Aboriginal people, Latinas/os to name a few), scholarship in CRT expanded beyond its earlier "Black/White" binary to consider multiple forms of oppression and the ways they are negotiated by oppressed people. (Aylward 1999, p.30; Delgado & Stefancic 2012, pp. 3-4; Yosso 2005 p. 72).

Though CRT is rooted in American scholarship, it can be applied – with slight modifications – to a Canadian context, and has been taken up by many Canadian scholars (Aylward 1999; Clarke 2012; Darnell 2007; James 2012; Lawrence & Dua 2005). Working with CRT, which "makes race, and its interlocking relationship with gender, class, and other demographic factors, central to any social analysis" (James 2012 p. 468), allows me to look critically at the experiences of the participants in this research. Furthermore, CRT provides tools to understand our society, and actively work to change

systems of oppression. A CRT approach rejects liberal and neoliberal claims (e.g. individual responsibility, meritocracy, colorblindness, etc. see Hylton 2010, p.339) and decontextualized and ahistorical understandings of social reality. Approaching this study in such a manner allows me to peel back the curtain on the structures of society that guide, and frame the choices made by and perceived options available to individuals.

CRT – which sees racism in our society as a given, rather than "aberrational or rare" (Hylton 2010, p. 339) – is essential in exposing the various ways that racism exists and operates in our society. Here, CRT can address the focus on class in Bourdieu's theory of distinction (in part due to the formalized hierarchical nature of institutions of France, as noted above) by incorporating the influence of race in North American societies such as Canada and the United States of America.

Yosso (2005) proposes a theory of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) that challenges misinterpretations of Bourdieu's work by educators. Her view is contrary to understandings that minority and working class students lack cultural capital (i.e. knowledge and skills) and thus require schools to fill them up with cultural capital. Instead, Yosso (2005) suggests, that working class and minority students possess different forms of social and cultural capital (i.e. Community Cultural Wealth) that allow them to survive and navigate a racist hierarchical system. Some of these forms of capital include aspirational, which is maintaining high hopes when faced with perceived barriers; navigational, which is "skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (p. 80); and familial, which is building bonds that extend beyond traditional ideas of "family" (pp. 77-

80). Even if this CCW goes unacknowledged and unrewarded in dominant institutions, it serves as a resource which working class and minority students might use to gain upward social mobility or avoid social decline.

Uniting these two theories, and applying them to a North American context, facilitates a more fulsome approach to the phenomenon of interest in this study. Bourdieu's theory of distinction is useful in understanding the dialectical relationships between decisions participants make, the influences in their lives, the resources available to them, and their various life outcomes. CRT augments the theory of distinction to underscore the various implicit and explicit ways that race works in racially hierarchically organized societies. With these theories, we can see how the dispositions (habitus) of participants are affected by the interactions between their class standing and race (which interlocks with gender and ability among other factors) which would lead them to engage in certain practices and employ various strategies as they navigate structures in society. In this way, I can look more closely at their schooling choices (and the choices made available to them), bodily practices (e.g. engagement in sports) and resources upon which they are able to draw.

In North America, the fields of education and athletics are integrated into the educational programs of institutions, and US athletic scholarships are rare, thus serving as a source of distinction. Therefore, we can see that, within such a context, individuals might struggle to attain US athletic scholarships (see Gilgunn 2007 and Wells 2009). Examining the investment in the pursuit of a scholarship, by the participants and their

support networks (e.g. parents, peers, coaches, teachers, mentors), permit us to see how this strategy might be a tacit recognition of economic and social disadvantage, partially influenced by race and class. In addition, the status of a scholarship as a "free" education could appear enticing with a recognition of one's own limited financial resources and an understanding that inflation of qualifications has led to a bachelor's degree being the basic requirement for most entry level jobs. Therefore, the experiences of participants and other important individuals in their lives might lead them to employ the strategy of pursuing a US athletic scholarship as a means to an educational degree and international experience[16] – and perhaps a professional athletic career – in an effort to achieve upward social mobility.

Despite this understanding, we can also account for social reproduction or, "the ways in which the educational or schooling processes, in particular, has helped to perpetuate or reproduce the social relationships and attitudes needed to sustain existing dominant economic and class relations of the larger society" (Singer & Buford May, 2011, p. 301; see also Harker 1990). Attending to the experiences of Canadian Black male scholarship winners, and the meanings they make from those experiences, allows us to take a closer look at their varying degrees of success in achieving the goal of social mobility through US athletic scholarships.

[16] In her research Gilgunn (2007) speaks about the symbolic capital associated with international experience and how traveling is often encouraged and valued in North American societies as part of the maturing process. Thus, going to the US on an athletic scholarship can become a valuable form of symbolic capital.

An important feature of CRT is to highlight personal narratives. Foregrounding the perceptions and experiences of participants, "rather than an 'objective' record of reality" (Broido and Manning 2002, p. 440), aligns with the phenomenological approach I take. Moreover, it is important to humanize and contextualize complex topics while telling stories from the margins.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

To conduct this project, I used qualitative research methods for their strength in creating, "a deeper and richer picture of what is going on in particular settings" (Goodwin & Horowitz 2002, p. 44). As Maxine Greene (1997) puts it, in qualitative research, "[t]he search is for understanding rather than explanation" (p. 1). The questions in which I am interested (experiences and meanings they hold for individuals) are not easily quantifiable and thus better suited to a qualitative approach. Specifically, I used phenomenology to conduct the research.

Employing phenomenology entails attempting to describe, in great detail, "the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan & Biklen 2007, p. 25). My goal is not to find "facts". Instead, I seek to describe what meaning the phenomenon of study holds for participants and the ways it is experienced by them, in order to illustrate the "essence" of the phenomenon. For the purposes of this study, the goal is: to explore and describe the ways in which Canadian Black male youth understand, and make meaning, of their experiences of having pursued and accepted an athletic scholarship to play basketball in US post-secondary institutions. I am uniquely interested in the understandings participants hold and the meanings they make of their pursuit and success in achieving the dream of "going south".

With a phenomenological approach comes a certain set of philosophical assumptions. Following the philosophical perspectives outlined by Mickunas (1990 in

Creswell 2007, pp. 58-59), I did my best to bracket or put aside my personal experiences to see the phenomenon with "new eyes". In this way the knowledge that I gather and present here is grounded in the information collected from participants. At the same time, I recognize that the meanings experiences hold for participants will be affected by their perceptions and consciousness of objects (Mickunas 1990 in Creswell 2007). By that I mean, the awareness that participants have of various things (e.g. people, structures, experiences), how participants relate to them, and the participants' conceptions of the ways these things are all interrelated, is influenced by the ideas they have and ultimately the meaning they construct from these things. Moreover, in order to make sense of the differing and converging meanings proposed by participants, I insert elements of my own interpretation and analysis. Therefore, I combine a hermeneutical (Van Manen 1990 in Creswell 2007) and transcendental (Moustakas 1994 in Creswell 2007) approach to phenomenology.

Some of the questions I explore include: what influences do Canadian Black male youth think played a part in their desire to "go south"? What meaning do Canadian Black male youth give to their experiences as US athletic scholarship winners? What factors do Canadian Black male youth think contributed to their current situations? Finally, how is the phenomenon on which this study focuses experienced uniquely (or not) by Canadian Black male youth?

While I strive to present the "essence" (Creswell 2007, p. 60) of this phenomenon, due to the nature of phenomenological research, the study is limited to the context (GTA)

in which it is conducted and the individuals (Canadian Black male youth) I was able to recruit. Also, I acknowledge that in trying to account for various interpretations of the data – bracketing my own experiences and foregrounding the views of participants – my findings will undoubtedly be influenced by my personal background and experiences. Therefore, any findings presented and conclusions reached will be my interpretation of the phenomenon.

Data Collection

The data collection phase of my project took place from December 2012 to February 2013. After receiving approval from the York University Research Ethics Board I began reaching out to contacts in the GTA basketball community – some whom I knew from my playing days and others whom I had never met. Contacts ranged from coaches at university, high school and club levels, to athletic administrators, athletic therapists, mentors, and former university basketball players. The GTA served as the focal area of my recruitment due to its racially diverse population and the prominence of basketball programs. In the GTA, community volunteers and coaches who have ties to US athletic scholarships recipients lead many youth basketball development programs. And some of these coaches and community volunteers themselves have competed on US athletic scholarships. As I expected, the GTA's closely-knit basketball community, and the use of contacts from my basketball career, proved effective in facilitating participant recruitment.

Though I did have success finding participants, it is in part due to a change in my initial recruitment criteria. In line with my research question, I recruited males who self-identify as Black. This did not change. However, I initially intended to recruit only athletes who have received an athletic scholarship from a Division I or II post-secondary institution in the United States of America, begun a bachelor's degree while competing on that athletic scholarship and returned to Canada, in the last one or two years, without completing their degrees. I only recruited athletes who have attended Division I or II post-secondary institutions, as they are, according to NCAA regulations, the only institutions permitted to provide "full" (i.e. tuition, room, board, and books) athletic scholarships (National Letter of Intent 2013a). The "full ride" is the most sought after scholarship, and institutions that provide them are thought to have the resources (i.e. coaching, facilities, exposure) most likely to propel college athletes to a professional basketball career. While it is said that in practice Division III schools offer other means of financial support (Dyck 2011), these are unofficial. Therefore, unofficial and other kinds of support would be more difficult to compare to "full-ride" scholarships and make it more challenging to claim that the phenomenon experienced by individuals is similar. However, future research might look into the experiences of Canadian athletes who do not receive a "full ride" and/or do not attend DI or II schools.

After a month of searching for what Wells (2009) would call "scholarship leavers" (i.e. athletes who had left an athletic scholarship in the U.S.) my efforts were unfruitful. In part, I think this may be related to the potential negative connotations

associated with not completing a degree. Coaches who guided youth to a US scholarship may have had a special concern for their reputations and the ways speaking to certain players may reflect on them. In the year leading up to my project, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (2012) televised what amounted to a scathing exposé on Toronto basketball coach Ro Russell, highlighting some of his improprieties, while attempting to continue his track record of sending Canadian youth to NCAA Division I basketball programs (James 2011). I got the sense that stories such as this may have led some people I spoke with to be guarded in helping me with recruitment, and leery of how and where the results might be represented. I should note however that there were some contacts who were exceedingly helpful in trying to find participants, going above and beyond what I would have expected.

Frustrated and looking to expand my pool of potential participants, I applied for an amendment to my protocol, which would keep the core participant group the same (i.e. Canadian Black males who have won US athletic scholarships) but would allow me to expand by including participants from across Ontario, who have returned to Canada within the last 5 years having completed their degrees before returning. From my first month of recruitment efforts, I knew that there would be more participants who fit these criteria and would allow me to continue without significantly altering the goal of my project.

The amendment proved successful and I recruited seven participants, who were between the ages of 22 and 28, from the GTA through a mix of personal contacts and

referrals from participants. This amount of participants is typical of phenomenological research (Creswell 2007, p. 131). Though I had never met six of the seven participants before, one of the participants was known to me. We were acquaintances from playing basketball as youths, though we had not seen nor spoke to each other in over a decade. In an effort to preserve anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout the presentation of research when referring to participants and schools that they attended.

I gained informed consent from each participant, after notifying them of their rights, including the rights to anonymity and to leave the study without fear of repercussions. The interviews I conducted were semi-structured and in-depth. All interviews were individual, with the exception of one focus group[17]. Interviews were my main source of data because they are a popular method in qualitative research, which captures the voices of participants. Furthermore, interviews are used because, in phenomenology, the central focus is "describing the meaning of a phenomenon for a small group of individuals who have experienced it" (Creswell 2007, p. 131). Interviews yield information rich in detail about participants' experiences and enhances understanding of this topic of study (Rice & Ezzy 1999 in Kingsley et. al 2010 p. 3).

The interview guide included six central open-ended questions (Appendix B), supplemented with several prompt questions. The guide was based on an example provided in Creswell (2007, p. 136) as well as some questions adapted from the interview guide used by Wells (2009). The open-ended method allowed me to probe for further

[17] This focus group was conducted with three of the participants prior to their individual interviews. This novel opportunity, proposed by the participants, allowed for the proliferation of ideas and thoughts and permitted me to have in-depth individual follow up interviews with two of the participants.

information and follow interesting lines of thought not included on the interview guide, but related to the main question. In an attempt to address new information that came through during data collection, I applied the constant comparative technique (Ryan and Bernard 2003) and used new information to modify the interview guide for subsequent interviews.

Interviews were conducted in-person at a mutually agreed upon location, and efforts were made to choose a context that ensured minimal distraction and noise interference. All interviews were audiotape recorded and supplemented by hand notes. Participants were asked to take part in an interview of approximately 60-90 minutes in length. On average the interviews were about two to two and a half hours in length. Though I was often conscious of going into overtime and somewhat anxious that I may be taking too much of a participant's time, all participants were more than willing to continue and offer information. For most of the participants, I gleaned that they had reflected on their experiences before, while some of my questions had brought new thoughts to light. For all, I got the sense that this may have been the first or one of the few times that an interested listener sat down with them to review entirely their experiences. They were likely interviewed before, perhaps in high school or college, but I imagine that, given the tight deadlines of most newspapers or magazines, their interviews were only cursory, scratching the surface at best. While these short interviews are arguably only a snapshot of the lives of the participants, what I offer is significantly greater detail and analysis than most news reports or television programs.

Immediately following each interview I completed a reflective memo detailing my thoughts and feelings about the interview process, in order to, "make implicit thoughts explicit" (Morrow & Smith 1995, p. 290). I transcribed all interviews verbatim[18] using word processing software and transcripts were stored on secure computers at York University. During and after transcribing each interview, I took notes, completing a full analytic memo when necessary to capture relevant ideas, thoughts and questions about the data that could contribute to the development of theory (Morrow & Smith 1995). Participants were sent interview transcripts to review for comments, corrections and anything that they desired to be omitted. Upon receiving approval of the transcripts from participants and wherever necessary, I followed-up via phone and/or email for clarification or elaboration on any points or ideas emerging from their interviews.

Data Analysis and Validation

Having read and reviewed the transcripts at least once, I developed themes inductively by applying scrutiny techniques as outlined in Ryan and Bernard (2003). Specifically, for the first round of coding, I identified significant statements by paying attention to repetition of topics, the use of transitions, and utilizing a "constant comparative" approach. That is, I looked for similarities and differences within and between participants. The constant comparative approach was also useful in identifying missing data. I formulated meanings for identified significant statements and developed appropriate corresponding coding categories by using, as guides, the coding families

[18] Some speech patterns (e.g. 'um,' 'uh') were removed for continuity of speech, and because I am not necessarily concerned with in-depth narrative analysis but rather the overall experiences of the participants.

outlined in chapter five of Bogdan and Biklen (2003). I paid particular attention to the coding families relevant to describing a phenomenon, as well as meanings participants made of their lived experiences (e.g. setting/context, perspectives held by participants, and participants' ways of thinking about people and objects, etc.).

To assist in coding interview notes, reflective and analytic memos were used for reference. Searching for theory-related material took place after the preliminary application of coding categories – to avoid, "find[ing] only what [I] am looking for" (Ryan & Bernard 2003, p. 94). I also employed the cutting and sorting technique, first looking for as many themes as possible, then scrutinizing them further to determine which themes might be grouped together, or are most significant, or should be discarded (Ryan & Bernard 2003). After applying codes to units of data, I re-read the transcripts, modifying or changing codes to find the best possible "fit". To distill the data, I then identified related significant statements and grouped them into overarching themes or meaning groups. Some anticipated themes included academic, athletic and social roles (Adler & Adler 1991; Miller & Kerr 2002).

Following Moustakas (1994, cited in Creswell 2007, p. 61), I used these significant statements and themes to construct both a structural (context) and textural (detailed account of what participants experienced) description of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. These two descriptions were combined to create an exhaustive description of the "essence" of the experience (Creswell 2007, p. 60). From this description, implications and conclusions were drawn and directions for future

research suggested. Throughout the presentation of this work, I have done my best to insert my own reflexivity and explanations for research decisions to account for "what is lost and what is gained" (Luttrell 2000, p. 500), thus approaching "good enough" methods for research (Luttrell 2000). In other words, I hope to make clear my various thought-processes, values, emotions, personal and research interests to balance the interpretations I present and decisions I made.

The retrospective nature of my project has both benefits and limitations. By having participants look back and reflect upon their experiences, I was able to gain insights into the ways that they understood their experiences and life trajectory. Of course, their memories may be altered by the passage of time perhaps limiting their recollection of events. Luckily, seeking to find some type of objective account of their experiences was not my concern. Also, by expanding the criteria to include participants who have returned to Canada in the last five years, there is the possibility that individuals may have experienced different conditions with respect to high school experiences and NCAA rules and regulations changes. However, I believe this variability adds to the richness of my project and the potential for comparing and contrasting experiences while also accounting for the convergences of similarities in their trajectories.

Despite these limitations, what I offer is a more in-depth, focused analysis than perhaps what has so far been completed on this phenomenon, from a Canadian perspective. Rather than providing "the truth" or definitive representation of all Canadian Black male youth who have attained US athletic scholarship status, these snapshots or

portraits of the participants – presented by them, interpreted and represented by me – serves as a window into a field of research in which the possibilities are wide open. As Kofi noted during our interview "a lot of kids need to read this." I would suggest parents, coaches, teachers and scholars, too.

CHAPTER 4

The Pre-Game: Pursuing the Scholarship

I divided the data analysis into three sequential parts: The Pre-Game: Pursuing the Scholarship; Game Time: Life at University; and The Post-Game: Coming Back to Canada. Rather than three distinct or separate parts, I have attempted to present these chapters more fluidly as one transitioning into the other. Accordingly, many themes recur throughout different parts of this thesis, as well as the various contexts participants encountered throughout their life trajectories and experiences. It is interesting to note this continuity even though there are structural, logistical, and temporal differences between the different contexts (e.g. high school is unique compared to college).

The Participants

For a snapshot of the participants, I have included a summary of some of their background information (Table 1). "Normal" or "average" is the way the participants described their childhoods and adolescence. They grew up with supportive parents, most of whom held working-class to middle-class occupations (e.g. school lunchroom supervisor, city outreach worker, nurse, university French teacher). Family makeup varied, but four of the participants were raised by their mother, three were raised by both parents, and the majority had siblings. Four of the participants had parents who were separated, and described having more or less contact with their father. The participants described having varying expectations from their parents but, generally speaking, their parents wanted to see them happy and successful in whatever life path they chose.

Table 1: The Background of Participants

Name	**Age started playing**	**College DIV**	**University Program of Study**
Darryl	12	DI	Marketing
Chris	"Younger than I can remember"	DII	Business Marketing
Kadeem	Middle school (11-13)	DI	Sociology
Joel	Grade 6 (age 11)	JuCo/DI	International Development
Kofi	Grade 6 (age 11)	JuCo/DI	Communication and Business
Devon	8	DI	Business Management
Junior	Middle school (11-13)	JuCo/DI	Physical Education

> Devon: I live with just my mom and I'm an only child, so she just wanted the best for me. And whatever I wanted to do, she was supportive.

One of the participants was held to fairly higher academic standards while most others were expected to 'do their best'.

> Chris: [My parents] didn't really have any expectations [in school]. My dad more so than my mom. My mom would just basically be like: 'If you try your hardest, whatever happens, happens'. My dad was like: 'You know what you need to do [to get a scholarship]', 'cause I was on it.

> Junior: I guess [my mom] just expected us to go to school, get good grades, try our best, and that was that.

Nevertheless, all participants were expected to get their high school education at the very least. And as long as their schoolwork was in order, parents were supportive of their athletic endeavours.

All participants grew up, or spent much of their time, in Toronto neighbourhoods that were working class or mixed income. Some of these neighbourhoods were stigmatized for being high crime areas inhabited by predominantly racialized citizens. The reputations of their neighbourhoods led participants to talk about them in different ways: some spoke fondly of the tight knit community and its many positive aspects which often go unreported in the media.

> Joel: [Valley Way] has been labeled bad and at times it was bad. But [Valley Way] is a community. Like I always say, it's a community. You know, there's a lot of people that live there and they look out for the community.

> Chris: I spent a lot of time in [Leaf View]. Honestly it wasn't bad. It has a bad reputation but it wasn't bad at all. ... there was a little bit of violence but it didn't really affect us as kids. All that stuff happened, when you're inside .... But, growing up you learn, where to be where not to be, what to be doin', what not to be doin'. And there's *so* many people in the community who look out for the

> youth that it's like, it's hard to go the wrong way, or at least for my group of friends.

Other participants remembered violence and having to look over their shoulders, even desiring to leave due to feelings of insecurity.

> Kadeem: [My neighbourhoods was] really bad. [There was] a lot of shootings, a lot of stabbings, a lot of drive-bys, a lot of drug infested, activities going on. You come home and you would kinda have to be aware of your surroundings. ... Not to say that I was a target but you just never know, in that area.

Regardless, their childhoods and elementary school experiences were not particularly remarkable in any way.

The Dream Begins - Adolescence/Middle School (Ages 10-14)

The paths taken by participants to get US athletic scholarships were far from cut and dry and each participant took various twists and turns throughout their youth to obtain one. Despite these differences, there are some readily identifiable threads or similarities, which run through their experiences. With few exceptions, the participants began playing basketball from an early age, mostly between the ages of ten and fourteen, though some started earlier. Basketball was often introduced to the participants by a family member (e.g. father, brother, cousin) or was picked up in their respective neighbourhoods and schools from being around peers.

> Kadeem: My cousin [Blue], who has been a big influence on my life, [had] a *lot* to do with basketball. You know, he kinda geared me in the right footsteps, in the right path in basketball alone.

> Junior: Me playing sports, at first [my parents] didn't know that [my siblings and I] played sports. It was just us playing in the back and my older brothers they, played sports. And they just, started making us go out for teams and stuff, and we

> still didn't know what we were doing. But my older brother, I guess he knew what we were doing.
>
> Joel: That's when I was kinda introduced to basketball, in middle school. Wasn't any good at it at all, but I was a decent height at that time so, that's why [my peers] told me to play basketball. You know: 'You're a little bit taller than everybody, just play. All you have to do is grab the rebound, pass the ball. Just don't do anything else.'

Initially, basketball was an enjoyable pastime. Most of their friends played basketball, making it an easy way to socialize and have fun being active. Playing basketball was also a way to avoid having no friends, or even being bullied as in the case of Darryl. Participants remember basketball giving them something to do which kept them from getting involved in activities perceived as negative and from hanging out with "the wrong crowds" in their neighbourhoods.

> Darryl: As you get older and you start to fall into a certain crowd, you kinda lose focus. One thing that helped me stay on track was basketball. I would say that basketball was the biggest tool in my life to help me stay on track and achieving the goal that I wanted to reach.

Though they would still interact with people in their communities who did not play basketball, being an athlete gave the participants a focus, which distinguished them from many of their same-aged peers.

In the interviews, there was a noticeable shift in attitudes towards playing basketball, leading up to or at the beginning of high school. From this point on basketball became the main, if not sole focus of their athletic energies and thus other sports (e.g. baseball, hockey, track and field) waned in significance. Sometimes this was a

combination of the cost associated with certain sports, the prevalence of basketball in their communities and the attention that being recognized as 'good' could attract:

> Darryl: If I had, put my all, into football, I think I woulda had more success. 'Cause I really did think I was more talented in football. Basketball was just something that I was around so much that I couldn't hide from, so I kinda just ran with it.
>
> Desmond: And why do you think you couldn't hide from it?
>
> Darryl: Because ... you can't play football in the winter really. And, I mean you can play basketball all year round. You only had to pay for a pair of sneakers, which came free, for me. All my friends really played basketball. And ... I just wanted to be 'the guy'. It's hard to be 'the guy' when there's so many players on the team, so. I could probably say that.

Darryl's comments suggest the convergence of multiple factors including socioeconomic status, perceptions of masculinity and self, and geographic location, which influenced his decision to pursue a basketball scholarship. Similarly, the participants cited a constellation of influences, which precipitated the shift towards focusing on obtaining a basketball scholarship.

> Devon: One of these coaches downtown seen me, and he's like: 'Where you goin' to school?' I said: '[UT High]'. [He said]: 'Nah, nah. You need to go to [Spring High].' ... I enrolled [at Spring High] in June, or at the end of grade eight.
>
> Kofi: When I was in grade 6, growing up, a guy named [Rich Strider], one of the biggest basketball players in Toronto history, signed a scholarship to go to [a major DI university]. ... [Rich] was one of the bigger dudes I looked up to when I was younger and he was just, one of the best players I seen in my life at that time. ...When I watched his first game then I realized, ... he was the best player here [in Toronto] and he couldn't even get on the court over there [in the United States]. I'm like: 'You know what? That's what I gotta do. I'm gonna play Division I basketball.'

Whether it was someone in their neighbourhood they knew that got a scholarship, the recognition of their outstanding playing ability – usually by peers and coaches – or the influence of the media – seeing successful professional basketball players and college players in the NCAA March Madness Tournament – the desire to pursue a US athletic scholarship developed.

This shift or transition meant playing basketball became more serious and the goal of getting a scholarship, more central. Joel, reflecting on his experience and describing advice he would give to aspiring scholarship winners, explains the shift:

> '...there's a difference between liking the sport, playing it and *playing* the sport, like *playing it*. Like when you play, you're studying the game. Now it's do you wanna *play it*, or you know, be the guy that likes to play?

Being 'the guy that likes to play' (i.e. for recreational purposes) was clearly not the path the participants chose. Instead, they invested significant amounts of time and energy, in the dream of winning a US athletic scholarship.

The goal became one of progression. Participants often described "trying to get to the next level", US college basketball. When I pressed to see where the idea of a scholarship comes from, Kadeem's answer was representative of other participants and the "natural" or implied progression embedded in the game of basketball:

> I think once you play basketball... (chuckles). Once you start playing that game, it's already associated with 'NBA', regardless. You can't stray away from it. It's right in your face. You watch basketball on TV. My favourite NBA player was Allen Iverson, so I tried to idolize my game just like his in a way. So I guess, as a kid, it's always, like automatic. 'NBA'. I wanna get there. I wanna be there.'

All wanted to get US athletic scholarships to play in the NCAA, and thus worked to acquire the skill and exposure necessary to attain one. College was seen as a stepping-stone to a professional career in the NBA (Ballingall 2013; Feschuk 2012) – for most another central goal early on – or some other professional league.

Though it did not figure prominently in discussions with participants, Kadeem's comments gesture towards the influence of the media and the background role that it played. Three other participants gave similar responses when I asked why an athletic scholarship was so important:

> Junior: 'Cause [it's] what you see on TV man; the media. It's what you learn.
>
> Chris: 'Cause you see it on TV, you wanna be them (chuckles). You know? A lot of kids they won't say, 'I wanna get a scholarship.' They say I wanna get a scholarship for the same reasons I said I wanna get a scholarship. 'Cause it's a stepping-stone to the NBA.
>
> Darryl: Because it's what we see on TV. [Division I]'s what the media makes seem like this is the only thing that matters.

The role of the media, which positions professional athletes as role models, has also been suggested by other research as an influential factor in American (Buford May 2009) and Canadian (Wilson & Sparks 1999) Black male youth dreaming of professional athletic careers in the NBA. Most relevant here, the work of Wilson and Sparks (1999) suggest that, even though the participants in their study were aware of the implausibility of playing in the NBA, the hype associated with media representations of celebrity athletes meant: "the 'dream' of 'making it' persists, despite their awareness to the contrary" (p. 18). The participants in this research were more involved in elite high school basketball

than those in Wilson and Sparks' (1999) study, and thus – due to the encouragement and reinforcement they received – likely saw the NBA initially as a more realistic goal.

The goal of winning a scholarship held various meanings for the participants. It gave them a certain identity or status to be known as 'the baller' or simply to be well-known in their communities and the city.

> Junior: I was tryin' to... not build a name, but put myself in that group ...of people that can say: 'Yea, in their time, they got a scholarship.'
>
> Chris: I just felt like, I kinda had that title like, 'The baller'. My friends, all of us were like, 'The ballers'. So it's like, we were supposed to be doing certain things 'cause everybody knew what 'our thing' was.

A scholarship meant a chance to relieve their parents and themselves from incurring potential future debt associated with post-secondary education – something ever-present in the minds of participants.

> Junior: ...If you're smart, you wanna help your parents out? Go get a scholarship. (Claps hands). End of story. You don't want your mom in debt; you don't want your mom to worry. You want your mom to be happy? Go get a scholarship.
>
> Joel: ...I wanna go to university but I don't wanna pay for university. Once I realized university, at the time was, ... three, four thousand dollars – and in tenth grade that's so much money. It's a lot of money now. But it's *so* much more money when you're like fifteen, sixteen, seventeen. So I was like, 'Heck no. I want a scholarship. Make the financial burden a little easier.'

Summarily speaking, participants described pursuing a scholarship as meaning "the world" or "everything". I got the sense that this goal was the preeminent focus in their lives at that time.

This goal of winning a scholarship had varying effects on participants as they decided which high schools to attend. Usually with guidance from a coach[19], many participants chose a high school that had a reputation for sending youth from the GTA to the US on athletic scholarships.

> Kadeem: When I went to middle school it was a coach there, Mr. [Frank]. That's who kinda led me to [Mountain Peak High]. 'Cause when I was to the point where I was graduating I was like: 'Where do I want to go? I want to go to a school that'll ... put me in a position where I'm able to get a scholarship.' ... [Mr. Frank] was telling me the knowledge and information about [Mountain Peak High]; you know, the coaches that were there and stuff like that. And I was like: 'Ok cool. This is exactly where I wanna go.'

Otherwise, participants transferred to a high school with a reputable basketball program within a year. This required for some participants, like Kadeem and Junior, to travel long distances from their neighbourhoods in order to attend a good basketball school. Yet, for some, athletics didn't necessarily factor into their choice of high school at all and they "got lucky", ending up at a school with a good coach or where a good basketball program would eventually develop that would improve their chances of winning a scholarship. This was the case for Darryl who didn't think about trying to play with a well-known coach and Joel who was more interested in the academic programs that his high school offered.

Taking steps to succeed - Grade 10-11 (Ages 15-16)

These two elements – a good basketball high school and a good basketball coach – were common across all participants and part of being or putting oneself in "the right

[19] Recall above how Devon decided the high school that he would attend.

environment" to succeed. They indicated that their coaches "knew what it took" to win a scholarship and were well connected on the Toronto basketball scene. A coach's reputation or "hype" was a key contributing factor to the success of participants. When I asked Darryl what he meant by "hype", he elaborated by saying:

> Like, everybody knows who this [coach] is. They know what type of players he produces: the quality, their character. So if you're producing the right product, to the media and to the world, then you're more credible. So they usually go to that guy first.

All of the participants worked with influential coaches in the GTA who produced elite-level basketball players and had built reputations of sending youth to the United States on athletic scholarships. The "hype" (i.e. symbolic capital or status) their coaches developed, could be transferred to participants as Darryl suggested. In this way, participants would become seen as more credible players via their association with reputable coaches who made "the right product" (i.e. NCAA-calibre high school basketball payers).

The role of key coaches in the lives of participant cannot be emphasized enough. Coaches invested significant amounts of time, and energy (sometimes money) into developing the skills of the participants such that they were significant sources of navigational and cultural capital. Coaches had the basketball knowledge (i.e. cultural capital) to teach participants how to play basketball at a higher level. Junior, as with many of the participants and their parents, did not possess the knowledge (i.e. cultural capital) to navigate the intricate steps necessary to get a scholarship. Therefore, he followed the advice of his coach. He reflected on a time when his coach asked if he would trust him to get where he needs to be:

> I didn't know what it was, [we] just kept training for, I'm like: 'Fuck man.' You know? But these guys knew, like they knew what I was training for. So I'm like: 'Alright ... I'll take your word for it.' 'Cause he played – my coaches played DI ball. [My coaches] knew what it takes... they played on high-level scholarships. 'I'll listen to you. Let me listen.' I listened, so that's what it was.

Coaches organized open gyms for extra practice and trips to the United States, to put participants in the right places at the right times, to gain exposure to US college scouts. For many participants who could not afford the full price of expensive trips, coaches found ways of getting funding to eliminate or reduce costs[20].

> Chris: [My high school coach] did a lot for us, too cause he was someone who loved basketball. He set up a lot of tournaments in the States for us to go to. ... And a lot of us didn't have money to pay for a lot of these tournaments. Him and [another coach] ...really put a lot of funding for us so we didn't have to come out of our own pocket for these tournaments, 'cause there's no way we would've been able to do it. ... They looked out for us a lot when it comes to financial support and also getting us places where we need to be to get exposed to US schools.

Essentially, coaches helped participants navigate the basketball field, doing everything in their power to put them in the right places at the right times, and secure them the competition, skill development, and exposure – both in Canada and the United States – they needed to be in a position to attain a US athletic scholarship.

Furthermore a key coach often had influence, which extended off the court playing a prominent role in developing the participants as people. Due to the significant formative role coaches played in the lives of participants, and the amount of time sharing experiences – both highs and lows – they were often referred to as a 'mentor' or 'father figure'.

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[20] Though I asked some participants how money was raised or where it came from, they often could not provide an answer, as it was something that the coaches handled.

> Joel: [My high school coach] was like a father figure. He was a very influential person at my most vulnerable time. So from like 14 to 18 when ... your views and your morals and all these core things are now shaping into who you're going to be as an adult. He helped shape me into a respectable, humble adult, or teen at the time.

At critical times in the participants' lives, coaches and mentors continued to provide cultural capital, helping them navigate the recruiting process (e.g. what questions coaches would ask and how to answer them) and providing advice on choosing between universities and scholarship offers.

> Devon: You go on AAU[21] trips, and you try to audition again, showcase yourself. And you know, you take a couple visits or you speak on the phone with people and your coach is advising you on what you probably should do or not.

Coaches instilled players with values regarding "how to be professional" and how to carry themselves as both athletes and individuals.

That I reference key coaches (plural) is important. Participants often cite one key influential coach in addition to several others. These coaches filled a variety of roles from getting exposure, mentorship, to academic and athletic support:

> Darryl: [My club coach] was always on my books. He was like: 'Books, books, books. Make sure you do good in school.' ... I would say more like [Coach Phil], my friend [Quincy], [Trevor] were more on: 'If you want to be this type of player, you gotta put in this much work.' Those people made me a 'gym rat'. So I was always in the gym, perfecting on what I need to perfect.

> Joel: In terms of basketball, [Coach Smith] was the most important. 'Cause he would drive me to the airport or drive me wherever they needed me to go. There was one time he drove me to [the US] to tryout for a team. ... He really pushed

[21] AAU, which stands for 'Amateur Athletic Union' is a US-based non-profit organization whose mission is: "To offer amateur sports programs through a volunteer base for all people to have the physical, mental, and moral development of amateur athletes and to promote good sportsmanship and good citizenship." (Amateur Athletic Union 2013) Among a variety of sports, the AAU plays a significant role in organizing youth basketball in the USA.

> me to be the best that I could be, or get as many opportunities to showcase how good I was. Same thing with just making sure I had the right studying equipment for the SATs. You know he even got me a tutor, and even helped me with certain math aspects and stuff like that... Maybe [Coach Grant as well]. 'Cause he put me on his [Leaders] AAU teams. ... We'd make like the super all-star squad, and would just crush these teams and then come home.

Therefore, multiple coaches played different roles in encouraging the development of components necessary to assemble athletic scholarship winners.

Being in "the right environment" for participants also meant being with a similar peer group. I consistently heard from participants that they were "surrounded by basketball", which meant that they were surrounded by "like-minded individuals" – other youth who also aspired to win US athletic scholarships. There was a clear sense that to be the best, they needed to beat the best – whether it was in their schools, on club teams or at organized workouts. In addition to facilitating competition and elevating the level of play, like-minded peers played a supporting role as Joel describes:

> .... My peers just helped keep basketball goin'. So if I didn't feel like playin' they'd be like 'Come on. I wanna play, so you should play. You have to play 'cause I'm playin'.' And I'll be like 'Ok' you know? Stuff like that. Little things like that. For the most part it was--, 'cause we were all focused on basketball, we just played it all the time and just kept each other sharp.

Chris described a similar situation with his friends:

> ...All of us would be on the same goals. We wanted to play basketball. We wanted to get scholarships. ... That's all we were focused on.... If I seen one of my friends doing something he's not supposed to be doin', I'll bring him aside and be like 'What are you doin'? If you're tryin to [pursue a scholarship], you can't do both. You have to pick one or the other.'... We were just there for each other.

The support of peers and other people in their lives was especially important for participants, considering the physical and mental stress associated with pursuing an athletic scholarship. Participants often described pursuing scholarships as "a grind", which required lots of time, hard work, dedication, sacrifice and passion. I was reminded of the five "Ps"[22] by Kofi and remembered, when I was pursuing a scholarship, the vigilance that this goal required – something several participants explained as a step towards achieving this goal:

> Joel: ...I worked on my game constantly. 'Cause ... you never know when there's some type of open run or opportunity to play in front of a scout. So you don't wanna take three days off and then you go and you're winded. So I always made sure that I was prepared to play whenever need be.
>
> Darryl: I made sure that I was in the gym, every day of the week. I only took the weekends off to just like, chill. I would make sure that I was in shape. ...That's the number one thing a lot of student-athletes need to be sure of, that you are in tiptop shape. You need to be in tiptop shape. It makes a difference.
>
> Junior: I wasn't that good at first ... so I was the type that I had to work hard; do what I had to do to catch up. 'Cause I have a small frame, I had to lift weights. It was a grind, it was a grind. I had to lift weights. I had to go through everything; like everything I did was always so hard. ... I had to do extra work. I had to shoot the ball more, I had to work on my handles. I had to polish--; be able to jump, you know? That was just me; I wanted to be that good of a player.

Much of the hard work that these participants put in paid off and they became known in their communities and the GTA as potential scholarship winners – a title that placed them in a distinguished category among other high school basketball players and could be worn as a badge of pride.

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[22] Proper, preparation, prevents, poor, performances.

From listening to the participants speak, what surprised me was the size of the networks to which participants had access, and the strength of these connections. In addition to support from teammates, family members, coaches, teachers and mentors, there were also community members who would 'look out' for them. All of these people combined to create what participants referred to as a "supporting cast" – in other words a network of support. People chipped in resources (time, energy, finances, attention) from all angles to aid participants in pursuing their goal, giving them access to a significant source of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005). These networks may have accounted for certain resources (e.g. money to attend tournaments in the US; knowledge of college recruiting process; resources to improve grades or SAT scores) that were less abundant for participants by providing such resources (i.e. navigational, economic and, cultural capital) or contributing to their development.

Overall, the experience of pursuing a US athletic scholarship can be best described as one of immersion. The combination of coaches and like-mined peers, facilitated by their schools and other basketball programs, created an environment where the participants were fully engrossed in the basketball world while growing up. I got a clear sense that everything outside of winning a scholarship, that would not facilitate achieving this goal, was deemed ancillary.

To my surprise, this even included girls. Though I expected the attention of young females to rank highly among their interests in pursuing a scholarship, attracting females of their age was usually only referenced as a footnote, if it all. In fact young females who

were interested in the participants were often angered by their devotion to basketball as Chris explained:

> A lot of girls used to get mad at me like (imitating girl): 'all you do is play basketball. You don't wanna spend no time with me. You don't wanna chill with me.' (Responding as himself): 'What do you want me to do? (chuckles) I loved basketball way before I ever met you. So, if you can't adjust to that then I'm sorry.'

Instead of spending time with several females, Chris was able to find one steady partner who was supportive of his aspirations, and who was still with him when we last spoke.

Whether or not participants may have downplayed their relationships with young females during their adolescent years I cannot be sure. Reservedly, and without going into too much detail, some acknowledged the attention that comes with being what Darryl described as: "kinda like a C-class maybe D-Class celebrity" including what Kadeem called the "miscellaneous", "pleasure[s] of life". But given the way participants talked about pursuing a scholarship, and how important the idea of winning scholarships were to them, I got a clear sense that they would not let anything or anyone deter them from achieving that goal – even if that meant sacrificing certain relationships and experiences.

Though they were in different parts of the city, all of the participants were in similar "basketball environments". These environments developed what Wells (2009) calls a "scholarship habitus": "...the collection of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that [high school athletes] embody and perform as they move through the field of high school athletics" (p. 37). Being around potential scholarship winners and with coaches who

helped develop scholarship winners (i.e. surrounded by basketball) normalized the pursuit of a scholarship as was explained to me by Junior and Devon during our group interview:

> Devon: ...We're always in the gym, from a young age. And seeing guys – like friends and teammates that you're playing with – leave to go on scholarships, and keeping up with them while you're [a] senior in high school–
>
> Junior: That's all you knew.
>
> Devon: Grade 11–
>
> Junior: You're next. You're next up.
>
> Devon: Pretty much you're next (Kofi agrees). And you just go through that system. And you know, if you're in a good school... you're just around it every day (others agree).
>
> Junior: It's what you know.
>
> Devon: Exactly.
>
> Junior: It's what you know. That's what it is. So the reason to go to US schools, is 'cause you seen guys go before. And you're like, 'Yo, I'm a part of that. I'm on the basketball team. I'm gonna go too.'

In addition to coaches, previous scholarship winners acted as valuable sources of navigational capital, and provided many of the participants with advice or encouragement.

The caveat with the approach of investing so heavily in basketball is that other, perhaps more transferable, forms of cultural capital (i.e. education) might not be as developed as their athletic skills. The fact that there was an expiry date[23] on their athletic careers – something many of the participants were cognizant of – and perhaps due to the

[23] All participants where aware that there was a limited amount of time that they would be physically able to play competitive basketball at a high level and that one day they would have to stop. In other words their capacity to play basketball would 'expire'.

influence of parents, coaches, teachers and other important people in their lives, participants spoke of the need to have a "Plan B" based on their academic credentials. This theme is explored further in Chapter 5.

Off the court, the classroom experiences of participants could be described as "average". They went to classes and made friends, and some engaged in extracurricular activities beyond basketball. Most participants described having average grades, though some were on the honour roll and others had grades just good enough to stay eligible to play basketball. But because winning a scholarship was such a prominent goal, participants described the roles of academics and athletics as "huge" and very important in their lives.

Balancing Athletics and Academics

Perhaps somewhat predictably, participants described athletics and academics as being "intertwined" or going "hand in hand". For some participants, practices would often be preceded by study halls (again provided by their coach) reinforcing this connection and preparing them for what they would experience in college. The perceived interconnectedness of academics and athletics is understandable, considering the requirements to win a US athletic scholarship and the way sport, in North America, is integrated with educational institutions. The relationship between athletics and academics was described by one of the participants, Darryl, in the following way:

> Like, there's a train, and anybody that was in athletics needs to be on that train. If you're not on that train, you're getting off at the next stop. 'Cause without both of them intertwined then ... the conductor ain't goin' any further. ... [A]nd [the

> conductor] was our coach, we weren't goin' any further unless you met these requirements.

Being "on the train" meant keeping one's grades above a certain average ("the bench point") to be able to play. "Getting off at the next stop", meant not playing basketball until their grades were above that average, if their grades ever slipped. For some, this was not an issue as they kept their grades well above this mark, but for others keeping grades up required regular attention.

Grades are important because maintaining a certain grade point average in core courses, coupled with high enough test scores on the SAT or ACT[24] are necessary to become eligible for an athletic scholarship. When they reached the recruiting stage, questions such as, "What are your grades?" or "Did you take the SAT?" would often be the first ones participants encountered from recruiters. The importance of academics led participants to describe having to ensure their grades were "better than their game" or at least close to that level, to win a scholarship. Therefore, even though the participants took university preparation courses and some described having average grades, many sought out extra help from teachers to meet these eligibility requirements.

Academics became especially important as the possibility of winning a scholarship reached a point of being achievable. Participants discovered the attainability of this goal in several ways. For some, it was a key coach that told the participants they

[24] The SAT and ACT are standardized college admission tests used by the NCAA and individual universities to help determine eligibility of high school athletes for attending US universities and receiving athletic scholarships (NCAA Eligibility Center 2013).

had a shot at getting a scholarship. Such encouragement buoyed their hopes and validated it as a worthwhile goal to pursue:

> Joel: And after eleventh grade is when the recruiting started. Tenth grade is when coach [Smith] had told me that, I had the potential to play and get a scholarship. And I was like, 'Are you serious?' and he was like, 'Yea. If you work at it you could.' And then that was one of my few goals; that I was like: 'Gonna get a scholarship.'

Getting Exposure in the US

For all of the participants a major influence was the opportunity to play basketball in the United States – either at tournaments or exposure camps – while they were still in high school in Canada. The effects of these trips on the participants were manifold. First, participants were able to gain greater visibility to US college scouts who do most of their recruiting in the United States[25]. Participants spoke of "having to market yourself", needing to be able to perform in front of the right people at the right time or simply having to "be seen" to get noticed. Such trips, it was believed, would get their feet in the door with US college scouts.

Second, trips to the US also provided a source of comparison. Being far away from scouts and their American competitors who were vying for the same scholarships did not hamper the ambition of participants. They were extremely confident in their playing abilities. This confidence was derived from their status as well-known players in

[25] From observation, there seems to have been a shift in recruiting practices from the time when the participants pursued scholarships compared to the present day. The expansion and increased accessibility of the Internet, and various electronics (e.g. digital cameras), personal websites, and file sharing sites like YouTube, have drastically increased the ability of high school athletes and their supporters to promote themselves to recruiters. Future research can investigate how this global shift in technology and the development of the Internet age have affected college recruitment and high school athlete self-promotion.

the GTA and from practicing or working out with and playing against some of the best players at their age levels in the city, province and country as Junior explained:

> It's the way you train though. 'Cause like, coach [Tee], [from Hoopmasters Basketball club], he ran a gym in [Lake Crescent].... And usually when we're at [Lake Crescent], that's the best of the best in the city [playing basketball]. So [pointing around room] he's the best in his school, he's the best in his school, [all] come to one gym. National teams – they *hand pick* guys. ... If you even see the national team...that means you have credibility at least. So you're playing against the best of the best in Canada.

But the US was the proving ground for many of the participants. They remember with clarity playing against highly ranked players, some who were projected to go to the NBA, and eventually did.

> Junior: [In] AAU, you don't know who you're playing against. Sometimes you come up against a team that has like a projected NBA guy. Like: 'Oh shit', you play them, your team might not win, but you put in work against him.
>
> Devon: And there's scout's watchin' him who see you. When you see all those twenty, thirty coaches on the sideline, you're like: 'Let's go. It's my time.' (Others agree).
>
> Chris: I went away in grade 12 for the summer... so I was in the States for more time than I was in Canada that summer. And I just played against all these [future NBA players]. I just seen how it is. And then also I seen the interest I was getting from coaches, and what schools were interested in me and what schools weren't. ...The smaller schools ... they all offered me scholarships. ... Nothing against those schools but they're not top tier basketball schools, for university basketball, you know? So, I realized then that maybe, I'm not the highest level, where I need to be in terms of skill level, for my age.

These experiences gave participants a better sense of where they stood in terms of their skills, and thus reinforced and made more attainable their goals of winning scholarships.

In terms of recruiting, trips to the US and basketball exposure camps achieved the desired results as participants started gaining recognition from college coaches and

recruiters. The fact that recruiting began and started picking up in the latter half of their high schools years (grades 11-12 and extra year) was perhaps the greatest signal that led the participants to believe that they could get a scholarship.

> Kofi: I went to a little couple AAU tournaments, stuff like that. I got my first letter from [States U]. Grade ten. After I got my first letter, the next year I went to [Exposure] camp. ... I left ranked top twenty; All-star game, top twenty game. Since that day? Calls, letters.
>
> Darryl: I went to junior college camp, where they had a doz-, like a million division 2 schools, a couple D1 schools and a lot of junior college schools. I got back home and my phone like literally blew of the hook
>
> Desmond: Really?
>
> Darryl: Like I had, probably 17 to 30 Division 2 schools and 3 or 4 Division 1 schools from that camp. And I had a couple junior college schools. And from there on my name was just being passed around, passed around, passed around.

Recruitment - Grade 12-13 (ages 17-18)

Though by the end of their high school careers all the participants were confident in their playing abilities, the recruiting process took different turns for each of them. For some, getting a scholarship seemed to be just a matter of course. Any pressure that came with pursuing a scholarship was largely self-imposed and part of an internal drive pushing them to become their best. The only question would be the Division level of the schools that would be offering them a scholarship and, perhaps for a few, the need to return for an extra semester to qualify academically. Nonetheless, they could choose from several scholarship offers and did not have to worry whether or not they would get one.

For other participants, the route to a scholarship was much more tumultuous. What is sometimes represented as a fairly clear cut process – play well, get exposure and

interest from colleges, go on recruiting visits and pick from schools – was actually full of ups and downs. The "ups" were described as a time of excitement, often associated with having a good game or playing well at a tournament and receiving lots of calls and letters. Participants described the recruiting process "like an auction", "auditioning" and "having to perform" in order to attract scouts. Being sought after by schools and trying to see what level of school they could attract was also exciting.

Recruiting Visits

A main driver of this excitement was recruiting trips. As part of NCAA regulations, potential recruits can make any number of "unofficial" visits to a university at their own expense, in addition to a limited number of "official" recruiting visits, which are all expenses paid by the recruiting school. Participants described these visits as "fun" and an opportunity to be "soaked up". Recruiting visits meant schools were more serious about offering them a scholarship and it was the school's turn to do some auditioning.

Official visits were highly orchestrated, in an attempt to give the participants a taste of university life and make the school look as attractive as possible. Everything was taken care of for the participants from their plane ticket and accommodations, to some entertainment and food, which was available in abundance as participants were told to order as much and whatever they liked at relatively expensive restaurants. Chris, whose experience was typical of the other participants, had this to say when I asked him about one of his official visits:

> They were cool. They just brought you around campus, show you where you're gonna live. I scrimmaged with the team, like the returning players. They'd room

> you with a group of guys from the team. And they'd try to take you out... try to introduce you to girls and everything. Try to make it like the school's the place to be. Like they have parties, they try to make it seem like you party all the time, everybody loves you 'cause you're on the basketball team. They don't really talk about the study hall and how the coach curses you out at practice and all that. They try to slide that under the rug 'til you get there. But yea, they try to show you the greatest time they can.

Chris' comments gesture towards the "politics of basketball" or "the game", a theme that came up at times during interviews and which is explored further in Chapter 5. Having finished college in the US, participants were wiser from their experiences and could take a step back to compare different points in their life trajectories and lessons learned. With greater perspective gleaned from additional experiences, they did not overly romanticize their recruiting visits, but remembered them in the moment as "an experience".

Darryl, who was recruited late in the season, was aware of some of the stereotypes associated with NCAA basketball, and the supposed fringe benefits athletes receive. The fact that our conversation up to this point had shifted to the high percentage of women at his university (something Darryl said coaches made sure to point out during his recruiting visit) may have triggered his response in the following exchange:

> Desmond: Can you ... tell me a story about the recruiting trip, and everything? What it was like?
>
> Darryl: I wish I could give you what you want to hear but [when] I went, because it was so late, there was nobody at the school. I had just a couple people that were taking summer classes in the second session of the summer.
>
> Desmond: Ok. So what do you think it is that I want to hear?
>
> Darryl: The parties that I went to, how I was treated by the females when I got there. Any events that happened that night. I wish I could; but nothing really happened on the trip. I was there for like a day and a half. We went out to dinner;

> we did breakfast; we did brunch. And that was about it. I didn't even get to meet anybody on the team.

Though most of the participants were acutely aware of stories about potential recruits receiving inducements to attend a university, none of them described experiencing it personally. This fact may have been indicative of both the level of schools recruiting them (mid to low level DI or high DII with a few getting higher DI schools), and their level of skill compared to other highly touted players at that time, who were projected to go to the NBA.

Feeling Pressure

With these "ups", came some crushing "downs". Because recruitment fluctuated, there were times when participants received little interest, if any, from universities. Though colleges may show interest in a player, no scholarship is official and the recruiting process does not end until a potential recruit signs an offer (National Letter Intent 2013). Some participants found this out the hard way towards the end of their high school careers:

> Joel: ...When the time is winding down and you have nowhere to go, and they stop calling, *that's* when it gets stressful. 'Cause there comes a point where they don't call you anymore. 'Cause they found someone that's like you; or better than you; or just fits the role that they need for that moment. So now they're done with you. When you're getting one or no calls, and you're looking to go somewhere, now it's like: 'Oh no. Maybe I shoulda done this different.' You start doubting what you were doing at the time. So it gets stressful.

In addition to finding a similar recruit, colleges tend to lose interest if a recruit has not qualified academically to become eligible for a scholarship. Participants learned that college scouts always have a few similar players in mind to "hedge their bets" but it is

hard to know who else a college is recruiting (even though recruiters would often tell participants "you're our number one priority"). The recruiting process was precarious with few guarantees, something Darryl later reflected on saying:

> A lot of schools, I had [recruiting me] kinda steered in a different direction 'cause I took so long to make a commitment and to do my SATs.... So I guess, once again, it shows you that you're not the only good player that plays this sport. So if you're gonna josh around and not sign with us, we'll just move on to a next student-athlete. And it just happens like that.

If they had not already signed a scholarship towards the end of high school, anxiety and doubt started to fill the participants' minds. This both inspired them to work harder and engendered fear of not winning a scholarship. Failure to win a scholarship would not only mean hard work wasted but participants perceived they would be letting others down – their school, their family and their community:

> Darryl: ...[T]here's kind of a lot of pressure on the athletes at [Toronto High]. Because every year you have at least two or three athletes that are going somewhere; whether it be DI, DII, Junior College, a prep school. So if, you're a guy that's under the radar and everybody knows who you are and you don't end up going anywhere, you're known as a bust[26]. Nobody wants to be known as a bust. So you work as hard as possible to make sure that we have something at the end of June[27]

> Kadeem: ...I guess I was going through some things in the family side of that. I was like: 'Yo I need to go. I need to go.' You know. 'Speed up the process, so I'm able to get that scholarship.' And then put myself in a position to play pro and feed my family somehow. I don't know, for some reason, I kinda put that on my back: for me to be that man, take my family out of the 'hood. So, yea, my grade twelve year, I was really, really stressed.

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[26] The stigma associated with being known as "a bust" or perhaps a failure, may explain in part why it was so difficult for me to find participants who returned to Canada before finishing their degrees while receiving an athletic scholarship from a university in the United States.

[27] There are two NCAA signing periods in which high school athletes can sign a letter of intent to attend a university on an athletic scholarship. One period is in late fall and the other is in late spring (National Letter of Intent 2013a)

> Joel: ...It felt like a lot of people, maybe it wasn't that many, but in my mind, it was like my whole, all my social circles were just on my back. Like: 'Yay. You're going. Finally.' Like: 'Yes.' So for me to be like: 'No.' I felt like, not only would it break their heart, it would crush me to a million pieces, like, you know? I was just super duper stressed.

"Free" Education

Regardless of their recruiting situations, it appeared that Canadian universities were not in the picture. The fact that a scholarship provided "free" education emerged as a prominent, if not the main, motivation to pursue a US scholarship. This led participants to avoid even considering Canadian universities, which could not provide comparable offers:

> Darryl: There's not very much difference from the US. But for Canada and the US, there is a difference because, once again, it's a free scholarship. They never say: 'We're gonna give you a partial', really. They never really say that. I haven't heard it. It's really just: 'You're gonna have a full athletic scholarship. Make this decision.' Here [in Canada] it's just like: 'We can work with you and try and get this paid for you.' And then it's like, nobody wants to hear that really; especially when there's other people going to school for free. So you kinda steer in that direction.

> Chris: I didn't even know they had Canadian scholarships 'til I went to the [Get Exposure] camp .... But then they said 'half scholarship'. I was like, 'I ain't doin' half scholarship.' And then they said they'll give you a full scholarship if you go outside of Ontario. I don't know, I didn't know too much about the rest of Canada back then. ... I guess I didn't take the time to do the proper research about all that. I was just too focused on the States at that time.

Being well-known as potential scholarship winners had a twofold effect. First, participants believed that they probably could have had their choice of Canadian universities if they desired. However, because they were so well known, Canadian universities were unlikely to recruit them as heavily as Devon explained:

> I think, in the city, [Canadian universities] know who's who and who could go somewhere, and who's getting looked at. So they don't even bother, I think. But if they know they have a chance, Canadian schools will probably attack and try to get the guy to come to their school. But nobody was really trying to recruit me in Canada. And I didn't think I was leaning towards it.

Reflecting on their recruiting experiences, some participants say they would have considered a Canadian school if they offered full scholarships. Staying home would have allowed them to stay close to their support networks. Others would have resented going to a Canadian school but would have gone to university anyway, though they would not have known where to begin to fund their education. Yet, looking back (as Chris notes above) they recall how ignorant they were of Canadian schools, partly because the ideas of winning a full athletic scholarship and playing in the NCAA were so prominent.

The Decision – Choosing a school

When it came down to choosing a school, various factors influenced the decisions participants made. Most significant among these factors were the academic and athletic situations they would encounter and the campus of the university. The importance of academics in winning a scholarship and preparing for life after basketball led participants to look for schools with good academic programs that would have the program of study they hoped to pursue. For Chris, the sole participant to attend a Division II school, he came to the realization early that, if NBA was not a realistic goal, he did not want to try the international professional basketball circuit and would instead need to shift his focus more towards academics:

> ...The one thing when I went on all the visits, I liked my coach 'cause he pushed academics so much. And was like, he was talking about: 'Yea, I have contacts in

> Europe'. But I wasn't really hearing him. But he would say it; it sounds good when you have a recruit there, right? And some players from my school played in Europe. So I was like: 'Yea, if I go here and I play really, really good, and say I change my mind, I want to go to Europe, it's still possible.' But more so I'm in a position where ... everybody's held to the same standards. In the classroom there's things in place to help the student-athletes....We'd have meetings with him, meetings with the assistant coaches. And if you don't do what you're supposed to do, there's gonna be consequences. And he let that be clear. He's like: 'Everybody that comes here excels here, if nothing else'. And I said: 'That's what I need'. More than anything else, that's what I need. 'Cause I wasn't really thinking about playing basketball, after university. I think that came from those young ages when I had those conversations with my friends like 'NBA or nothing'. So I even brought that into my whole recruiting process. And that was in high school. So that's one of the reasons why I chose [American U].

Participants were excited to get to the "next level" and thus factored into their decisions the playing situation they would encounter. None of the participants were complacent with getting a scholarship to simply sit on the bench or be "practice players", so they chose universities where they felt they would play right away, or at least be given the chance to earn their playing time. Save for Chris, all of the other participants wanted the experience of playing Division I basketball and to get the best competition and athletic development to prepare for the possibility of a professional athletic career.

Related to the playing situation was the impression participants had of a head coach and the coaching staff. During their recruiting visits, a head coach talked to participants about how much he wanted them to come to his university and what they could expect if they decided to attend. Participants followed their intuition and tried to get a feel for which coach would provide the best situation:

> Chris: ...Hopefully, if you have a real coach, he'll keep it real with you and be like: 'Listen., when you come here it's not gonna be all fun and games. It's gonna be this, this, this and this.' And not all coaches are like that.

Having a supportive coach who made them feel as though they were wanted was important as the participants were leaving behind their networks of support. Even then, some chose to attend schools that were closer to Toronto, which would make traveling easier both to get home and for friends and family to visit.

The university campus, and the associated city in which it was located, was also influential. A smaller school was more attractive to some who wanted a community feeling where they would not be "just another number" – something which perhaps would ease the transition to university and limit feelings of alienation. Others wanted to experience a big college campus, or at least a big city with a historic reputation. Essentially, deciding which college to attend boiled down to choosing an environment that was both conducive to their future success and provided the opportunity for exploration, new experiences, and a range of possibilities.

The Junior College Route

However, the recruiting process did not go so smoothly for all participants. For some, it sounded almost as if they were left with no choice. The experiences of Joel and Junior are two notable examples. Junior played well throughout high school and gained recognition for his playing ability. Yet, his academic performance kept him from being eligible for a scholarship. Influenced by a high school teacher, he started to pick up his grades by the end of high school but by then it was too late. Coming to this realization was harsh for him especially because he knew so little about the Junior College (JuCo) system, the immediate alternative. Junior Colleges offer two-year programs that provide

students with the credits and academic preparation needed to gain entrance to a US university. In practice, the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) acts as a feeder system for the NCAA: academically ineligible athletes acquire their academic credentials while simultaneously developing as players in some of the highly competitive divisions for certain sports.

In addition to his grades, one of the challenges faced by Junior was the perception recruiting coaches had of his appearance. With some apparent hesitation, he explained the way his image was an obstacle to his recruitment for a scholarship.

> Junior: ...I didn't qualify [for Division I], so my coaches dealt with it for me. And [my coach] was like havin' a— he wasn't havin' a tough time but, he was— I had braids back in the day, and most college coaches thought I was a gangster and shit. And they get turned off of that stuff. They would ask questions like, 'What area is he from? Does he have any tattoos? Does he have his ears pierced?' They ask questions like that. Ears pierced, 'Has he got in trouble with the law? Does he smoke weed? How is he in school? Do I gotta baby sit him?' 'Cause coaches wanna do their job. They don't wanna do all that shit. You wouldn't know unless someone told you this though.

Though Junior was the only participant to describe such an experience during recruiting, the questions he encountered had undertones of the racial dynamics at play in American college sport. Scholars and statistics have shown many times over that, in major college revenue-generating sports (like basketball), the athletes are predominantly Black while the coaches are predominantly White (Lapchick & Brenden 2006; Lapchick et al. 2009; Lapchick, Hoff, & Kaiser, 2010). What Frantz Fanon (1952/2008) would call being "overdetermined from the outside" (p. 95), being Black meant that Junior had to shift his habitus (i.e. dispositions, "style") trying to separate himself from negative stereotypes

which were often associated with young Black men. These stereotypes had the potential to hurt his chances of being attractive to coaches and thus being able to obtain a scholarship. After the initial disappointment of not going straight to Division I subsided, Junior accepted that he would have to go the JuCo route. And eventually his coach found him a JuCo to attend on a full scholarship, which gave him a chance to gain the credits he needed to get to the next level, the NCAA.

Reflecting later in our interview on all of his experiences, Junior talked about others' perceptions of him as part of the many challenges he had to endure to get a scholarship:

> ...I had to cut my hair, my braids. 'Cause they thought I was a 'G' [i.e. gangster]. I had to change my image. Fuckin' smile a lot more, be more talkative. I wasn't talkative before, ... if I had nothing to say to you, I wouldn't say shit.

Such comments challenge notions that a player can simply win a scholarship based on merit. There are other important factors like "presentability" and "coachability" and "professionalism" – things that some of the participants were coached to exhibit and which I, too remember being told were important when I was pursuing a scholarship. These other factors also influence the decisions college recruiters make to offer a scholarship. Knowing the "right" ways to act, or already exhibiting such characteristics inherently (i.e. habitus), is important to coaches of athletes in high visibility sports like basketball where athletes are considered to be representatives of the school. Thus, constructions of race, built on a litany of historical and persisting stereotypes of Black men, and the ways Blackness is interpreted in North America – especially in the realm of

college sports – often lead to Black male basketball players receiving a level of scrutiny that others might not.

Joel's experience made it clear that in recruiting there are no guarantees – even after a letter of intent has been signed. Joel excelled academically in high school and was pushed by his parents to do so from a young age. His academic determination led him to see that the work ethic, focus and dedication he applied in school could translate onto the basketball court. He was recruited by strong academic universities and eventually became eligible with his test scores. After the initial excitement of qualifying and signing with a school, a series of events in his final high school year cast doubt on his scholarship hopes.

> Joel: ... The craziest thing is, the day I qualified, the head coach of [Big U1] took the job to go to [Big U2]. And then he called and said: 'We're gonna get your stuff transferred to [Big U2] so you can come [here].' So it's like: 'Cool.' But then he finds out he can't fit anymore guys on the team, but he didn't tell [Big U1] to finish the recruiting with me. So then, when [Big U1] found out that I was there (i.e. on the recruit list), it was too late.

Despite losing this scholarship opportunity, Joel still had chances to be recruited by other universities, by playing on the AAU circuit and at any open gyms or tournaments where he could get exposure.

Joel was successful in garnering attention from scouts looking to offer him a scholarship. But because, in one instance, the coach was fired from a university to which he signed a scholarship and, in a separate instance, another player was picked over him (partly because an assistant coach at that college knew the other recruit) he was again left with no schools.

> Joel: ...Everything else after that was ... either go to Junior College or keep yourself available for another year. [Teams would say] 'All our scholarships are taken now but next year we can recruit you again.' That's what I was getting a lot of, towards the end.

Reluctantly, he settled on a Junior College. Reflecting on his decision, Joel had this to say:

> I was in the mode of, 'I don't want to go to Junior College at all. 'Cause Junior College is like *high school*, but just a *step*, a step above high school.' ...I was like, 'No. That's an insult to how hard I've worked.' Right? But then my coach, my assistant coach for [Harper High] called me in August and he's like, 'Hey, I have an opportunity to send you to [Southern United States], Junior College but it's one of the top regions in Junior College. Do you wanna take it?' And I was like: 'Fine.' You know, 'cause, my options are so limited.

These examples display the uncertain nature of a scholarship and thus account for some of the stress participants described while pursuing a scholarship. It also may explain the relief that some participants expressed in not having to go through such situations, even though they had heard of similar stories and knew "anything could happen".[28]

Getting the Scholarship

When participants finally secured the scholarship it was cause for celebration. Everyone in their support networks was elated, sometimes even more so than the participants themselves. The participants often described the feeling of getting scholarships with a mix of joy and relief. Up to this point in our respective conversations, I could hear in their voices how stressful trying to win a scholarship could be at times and the endurance that it took:

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[28] Future research may want to look at the differences between prospective university athletes and their non-athlete peers. Because most students go through an application process, they are guaranteed a spot at a university once an offer is made. Though they may have different stresses to deal with (e.g. the cost associated with attending university in the US), they would not have to deal with the precariousness of an admissions offer which involves losing a scholarship.

> Junior: ...Once I obtained the scholarship, it was like a weight lifted off my chest, like I could finally breathe. 'Cause I remember I was like grindin' so hard, all this hard work. And then when I signed to [JuCo], the one in [Southern United States], it was a weight lifted off my chest. I could finally breathe.
>
> Devon: It was great, man. It was great. It was a relief [of] pressure for my mom, you know, trying to figure out a way she would pay the tuition. I didn't wanna put her through that. Doing something you love to do, almost for free – [playing] against great players – was something I wanted to do.
>
> Kadeem: ...It meant a lot bro. It was a big, big, big relief off my shoulder, off my heart. It was a great feeling man. A great feeling. Just to know that you're actually there, you signed your letter of intent. You're going to a Division I basketball program. Leave your area, to something new.

Conclusion

The stories of all the participants show how much resources, timing, and chance go into actually acquiring an athletic scholarship. Inspired by a number of influences (e.g. peers, family, media) participants became deeply involved in basketball leading to the development of a dream to 'make it' to the NCAA. However, simply having a dream was not enough to realize it. As their desires to make it to the NCAA grew, participants employed several strategies (e.g. playing under coaches who developed scholarship winning athletes; surrounding themselves with like-minded individuals; traveling to play in the US to get exposure to US college scouts) that they believed would most effectively position them to obtain US athletic scholarships – an achievement that they believed would increase the likelihood of realizing their goals to play in the NBA. Much of the participants' identities, and their hopes and dreams of the future were invested in obtaining US athletic scholarships. This fact was made evident through the moments of

excitement and disappointment participants described experiencing during their pursuit of athletic scholarships.

Eventually, the participants saw the fruit of their labours. However, success did not come without hours of practice – in the classroom and on the basketball court. Equally important was the assistance of their networks of support to whom they frequently expressed appreciation for being in their corners. Despite all participants eventually going on to play Division I or II basketball on athletic scholarships, the experiences of a few participants displayed that getting to the NCAA does not always involve following the well-trod path. Indeed the assumption of being able to choose from prospective scholarship offers does not always hold.

Assuming they finished with good enough grades (some had to return to high school for an extra year or semester to upgrade) the participants would be on to the next stage of their lives – university and playing basketball in the United States. Most, if not all of the participants looked forward to the opportunities to live on their own, travel to another country and experience something new. In the next chapter of their lives they would have a chance to explore their dreams, and the possibilities of college athletic, academic and social experiences.

CHAPTER 5

Game Time: Life as a College Athlete in the United States

Turning the page on a new chapter in their lives, the transition to living, studying and playing basketball in the United States brought about a variety of new experiences and revelations for the participants. Much like the recruiting process, life at college was full of ups and downs. The initial adjustment brought a multitude of new challenges, excitement and lessons. As the participants became accustomed to their new routines, they were better able to manage the multiple demands placed upon them. Towards the end of their university careers, some participants changed career paths, as windows of opportunity closed and new possibilities opened up. At the conclusion of their scholarships, all of the participants felt as if they learned more about themselves and grew as individuals. In this chapter, I trace the experiences of participants as college athletes in the NCAA.

Dealing with a new educational and athletic field – not to mention a new country – required much from the participants. They had to use capital already acquired during their high school careers in addition to seeking out new forms. They applied various strategies in order to adapt to university life, most of which were picked up "on the fly" as they were forced to 'sink or swim'. To represent the various facets of participants' university experiences, I organized this chapter into two sections: 1) Becoming a University "Student-Athlete" and 2) Being a University "Student-Athlete". These sections serve to demarcate transitional from settled or acclimatized experiences. While

there are certainly notable shifts in their experiences, some of them merge into, or are in fact foundational to others and should thus be understood accordingly.

Becoming a University "Student-Athlete": Adjustments and Transitions

For most youth, beginning university is a time mixed with anticipation, excitement and anxiety; as much could be said for the participants in this research. However, multiple factors related to their roles as athletes, students and Canadians in a new country, contributed to participants describing the transition to the US as "tough" and "hard". Whether they were at a Junior College for one to two years or went directly to university, this transition was equally challenging. Though they had acquired the status of being worthy to receive an athletic scholarship many participants described having to "start from the bottom", and prove themselves all over again.

College Athletes as Students

In their respective university classrooms, participants came across many new ideas that they had not encountered before. The shift to university – new styles of teaching and increased work volume – meant a steep learning curve for some participants, who felt as though their high school educations did not prepare them fully for university. The student half of the "student-athlete" equation requires college athletes (as in high school) to maintain a certain GPA to stay eligible to play and thus grades continued to be important.

News reports (Lieber Steeg et al. 2008; Upton & Novak 2008) and some research (Case 2013) suggest college athletes are streamed into "bird" courses and majors, which

facilitate maintaining eligibility. However, I did not encounter any such trends in this research[29]. Five of the seven participants selected their courses and majors quite pragmatically. Soliciting advice on courses from peers or teammates was common and they looked for classes where they felt they would learn more, be engaged, and have professors who were more understanding of the challenges faced by student-athletes.

> Chris: My main thing was [to choose] courses that would interest me, and courses where someone else took, where they said the professor's good.
>
> Joel: [I took] whatever just worked. I was kinda just listening to what people have chosen before in the past, and see if I can try out that.

Though they were available, most participants did not rely on advice from their team's academic advisors to choose their majors and they did not report being steered towards particular disciplines. All participants were focused on graduating but some had selected majors with more foresight than others. Some selected a major based on their interests at the time, whereas others chose the program which their high school credits would allow them to enter most easily. Perhaps due to already completing a couple of years of Junior College, or attending universities that did not have the highest academic reputations, a few participants described the academic transition as relatively smooth.

Making it in College Athletics: What does it take?

On the court, participants faced a higher and more intense level of competition – in practice and games – than they experienced in Canada. Going up against older, and

[29] The amount of participants (7) makes it challenging to draw any definitive conclusions on this topic. And though they are related, for this thesis I am more concerned about the experiences of participants than the practices of athletic departments.

sometimes bigger and stronger players, who already had a couple of years of experience in college, was humbling for most. Kadeem described one of his earlier practices:

> ...The guard that I was going up against, he wasn't all that good, man. But the thing about him, his hustle, he out-hustled me.... He would do just the little things: he would steal the ball; he would charge; he had so much energy. As a freshman you don't know, like: 'Damn. Is this the level I'm supposed to be at?'

Many participants described underestimating the fact that they would play with athletes who, similar to themselves, were also stars at their respective high schools.

Beyond the greater level of competition, the athlete part of the "student-athlete" equation meant adjusting to a focused, almost militaristic-like schedule. The participants described schedules that sounded overwhelming to me and incredibly taxing compared to the daily schedule I remember keeping as a university varsity track and field athlete. During the group interview, Kofi explained a typical day:

> ...We wake up at 6 in the morning. 'Cause I'm a point guard, coach made me get up at five; do extra work in the gym. Then we have our little lift weights or whatever at 6am in the morning. I would always have an 8:45[am] class. ... And then after [class] we have *individual*, which is like training work out for an hour and a half, [at] like eleven or twelve. Then we have practice at 3:30[pm] – *full contact practice* (Other's agree). For two hours, two and a half. Then, after, we have study hall, or training table to eat at 6:30 [pm]. Then study hall..., unless you're getting like a 4.0, from seven to eight. So you're up from six in the morning and you're doing *active* things for like four, five hours of that day. And then you have to study while you're going to class. And then find time to eat. (Devon: And take care of your body). And take care of your body.

The imperative to win, so prevalent in American college sports, creates an environment where college athletes, especially those on scholarships, are expected to spend a significant amount of time developing their athletic skills.

The stresses associated with the workload of being a "student-athlete" weighed heavily on the participants at times, both mentally and physically. Though academics and athletics continued to go "hand in hand", the duration and intensity of basketball initially made finding a balance more challenging:

> Darryl: It was kinda like burning both ends of the candle. It's like, it's very exhausting the first year. 'Cause I remember my first year, I was falling asleep in every class. ... I was having trouble adapting to that type of lifestyle – class, practice; class, practice; class, practice. So it was just like I was always exhausted no matter what.

Though Kofi's example was one of the busier schedules, as Darryl's comments suggest, the schedules of other participants did not deviate greatly. It appeared that their nascent experiences of both freedom and isolation left participants to figure out the athletic-academic balance mostly by themselves.

Indeed, the perceptions participants had of their transitions being more difficult may have been amplified by the removal of their networks of support. Whereas at home they had developed longstanding relationships with peers, mentors and coaches, in college, they were now largely on their own for the first time in their lives. In a completely different environment they had to develop new networks and even carrying out the mundane aspects of day-to-day life (e.g. laundry, groceries, cooking, etc.), posed new challenges as Chris explained:

> That's the toughest part of being away from school that a lot of these kids who are trying to get scholarships right now don't really know. If you haven't been away from home before, if you depend on your family for certain things, it's tough. It's a tough experience. You really grow up fast when you're out there cause basically you're living by yourself.

This experience of a loss of significant social capital (e.g. family, peers, coaches) and community supports meant that participants had to learn how to rely more upon themselves and develop the social (e.g. friends, mentors) and cultural capital (e.g. study habits, knowledge of cultural norms in the United States) they needed to succeed in college.

Being Canadian

Playing out in the background of the various new experiences for participants was transitioning to a new country, which added to the learning curve of college life in the United States. Similar to other research (e.g. Gilgunn 2007), participants noted various cultural differences (e.g. language, mannerisms, style of dress and store names) as some minor changes they had to navigate. The many similarities shared by Canada and the US (a perpetual source of concern for Canadians fearing Americanization) did not restrict the participants from being perceived as "different".

> Darryl: ...For the first half of the season you get made fun of a little bit, 'cause you have that English accent to [Americans].... So they make it sound like you're British or have like a British accent. Anything different sticks out really. So some of the things that [Americans] say you don't really understand. They have to dumb it down for you. It's just another learning process.
>
> Joel: At first, that was a hard transition, 'cause you get singled out, kind of. 'Cause you're really, really different, you're considered like an alien or you're a real foreigner, but you're not really foreign; you know everything [Americans] know and you have everything that they have. So, transitioning there, that was a hard part of transitioning, just the cultural dynamic.

Likely due to the prevailing "Black-White" discourse of the United States, participants often went undetected as international students at first. But once their

Canadian nationality was discovered it was typical for them to face a barrage of questions as Joel explained:

> ...I'm in [the Southern United States], they're like: 'Where are you from? Why do you sound the way you sound? 'Cause you're not from... [Northern United States], so where are you from?' So I'm like: 'From Canada.' They're like: 'They have Black people in Canada?' That's the first question they ask. Then they're like: 'You guys know what heat feels like?' That's the second question they ask. So to hear these things ... Like when I saw on TV the jokes, to actually hear some of it, was unreal. 'Cause I'm just like: 'No. No one really thinks these things.' Right? But, they do.

The stereotypical idea of Canada as the 'Great White North' was an experience encountered among participants, despite being at universities in various regions of the United States. As with Joel, many of the participants expressed surprise and a certain amount of distain at hearing these questions – sometimes asked jokingly but more often seriously. In a team setting, being Canadian often meant having a strike against them. Perhaps due to the reputation of 'friendly Canadians' and the American understanding of the US as the epicenter of basketball, participants cited having to sometimes contend with being singled out by coaches or teammates as less 'tough' or capable.

Most of these comments were brushed off by participants and chalked up to American ignorance. In fact, being singled out as Canadian often served as motivation: to represent where they were from; to educate others about Canada and Toronto more specifically; and to work harder to prove that they had the grit and skill to keep up with, and surpass, their American counterparts:

> Chris: [Being Canadian] was fun. It's like, you find yourself defending Canada. Speaking on behalf of like everybody who's ever played basketball in Canada

> [chuckling]...I hated the [Toronto] Raptors[30] but when I was at school, when I was with my *team*, I always liked the Raptors. You just gotta, you know, represent Toronto, represent Canada.
>
> Devon: ...I'll tell them anything about Toronto. I'll back my city against their city any day. And I'll tell them to go Google it. 'Look it up, look it up. My city's better than yours. Trust me.' And then, once you're so prideful about something, people start to believe it. And you just gain some respect like that.
>
> Kofi: ...You're against the wall, just cause you're Canadian. Like you get in the most altercations just 'cause somebody's saying, 'Oh, you're from Canada, you're soft.' Everybody thinks you're soft; everybody's trying to pick on you all the time, regardless. So I think, after you get through that initial barrier of them realizing that you're not soft and that you can play ball, not just amongst them, but better than them, then everything's cool.

Being Black

The experiences of participants were also mediated, in varying degrees, by race. Usually, depending on the universities participants attended and the region of the country in which it was located, being Black was experienced differently. Some participants went to universities or Junior Colleges where the population was mostly Black and thus, they blended in with other students. Yet, most participants went to colleges where the majority of the student population was White. The participants did not see this as a problem as they considered themselves "people persons" who get along with pretty much anyone. Rather it was a significant shift from their more mixed peer groups, and what they were used to growing up in Toronto where a greater proportion of the population includes racialized people.

[30] The Toronto Raptors are the NBA franchise team in the city of Toronto. Since the departure of the Vancouver Grizzlies NBA franchise to Memphis, Tennessee, the Raptors are currently the only NBA team in Canada.

When I asked participants what it was like being Black on their campuses the following responses were typical:

> Chris: It was funny because being Black on campus, kind of almost meant you're an athlete (chuckles). That's what it kind of meant.

> Devon: If you were Black or Coloured, you were usually on a sports team. I'd say 90% of them were on sports teams. 'Cause we went to a private, pretty wealthy school. Costs about $48,000 a year to go, and got up to 52 [thousand dollars] my senior year. So the kids you see are obviously a little more well off, so people come from different walks of life, but I'd say our campus was mostly White. But the Black people were athletes and a couple sprinkled in. As crazy as it sounds, there weren't too many, other than athletes.

As Devon's quote suggests, race is often understood as implicitly tied to socioeconomic status thus explaining the phenomenon of most "Black students-as-athletes". The ways economic stratification plays out in the United States of America and Canada often sees Black and other racialized groups disproportionately disadvantaged economically (Macartney, Bishaw & Fontenot 2013; Galabuzi 2005; McDougall 2000; 2007; Picot & Hou 2011). The high tuition prices at American universities (especially privates ones) make post-secondary education all but inaccessible to the most economically privileged individuals or those willing to take out mortgage-sized loans to pay for an education. These circumstances contribute to universities composed of predominantly White students, most of the Black students are athletes, and a few others are "sprinkled in".[31]

[31] The phenomenon of Black athletes at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) is fairly well documented in American research and has been an area of great interest. (Hawkins 1999; Singer 2005; 2008; Steinfeldt, Reid & Steinfeldt 2010). Further exploring the ways experiences may or may not differ for Canadian and other racialized international students would be an interesting area of future research.

While most did not experience any issues associated with being Black, two participants described experiences of outright racism. Coming from Toronto, this was something they were not used to:

> Kadeem: There was one time where we went to a party, it was off campus and there was a bonfire going on. ...And, I don't know, some White guy...yelled out, 'Y'all niggers! This that.' ... And I was a freshman then so I was like: 'Whoa!' ... 'What is going on?' ... I was always afraid— from that moment I was hesitant to talk to White people. ... So, that example just kinda made it for me, that: 'Yea, White people out here are serious.'
>
> Desmond: Even though you were on the basketball team.
>
> Kadeem: Even though. ...[R]acism still exists. When I went [to university] I was like, 'Damn! This is real'. I go from Toronto-...in a sense it's hidden. [In the US] it's out in the open.

Junior described similar experiences:

> Junior: ... I'm miles away at the bottom of the fuckin map, [Southern United States]. Where they don't even like Black people, for real. But I was in a good town, so you know. It wasn't the students that I went to school with. It was the parents, and shit that like, ...something didn't go their way like: 'Fucking nigger' or some shit.
>
> Desmond: They'd say that?
>
> Junior: Yea. That's light ... You walked on their property? They had a license to shoot you. Shit like that. Fuck. Police officer, you walk around campus without your ID after hours: 'Yo where's your ID? Go back to the dorms.' And they're sonnin' [i.e. disrespecting] you. Like that's it....you have to take that, you have to go back to the dorms. Or you can get your ID and walk around. Stuff like that.

Both Kadeem's and Junior's experiences point to the ways racism is expressed in some part of the United States[32]. This explicit racism was startling compared to the "racism with a smile on it's face" (i.e. implicit) (Foster 1996, p. 320) they may have experienced

[32] This experiences also mirror racial profiling that takes place in Toronto (see *The Toronto Star [2012]* 'Known to Police' series) and other parts of Canada (Handfield 2010; Radio-Canada.ca 2012).

in Toronto, and changed some of their perspectives and behaviours. Again we see recurrences of what Fanon (1952/2008) described decades ago as 'L'expérience vécue du noir'[33]: "I am not given a second chance. I am overdetermined from the outside. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me, but of my own appearance." (p. 95)

Interestingly, when Joel reflected on the role race played in his various experiences, one story he shared almost exactly matched Fanon's description:

> ...When I was in university... I kinda like just stopped shaving. So my beard would be pretty full. And I guess I might've had a menacing look. But not everybody smiles when you're going through your everyday task. Like you're not smiling, so I don't know how your face is supposed to look. But usually, after talking to people, the statement I get after was: 'Oh I never thought you were like this. ... You're actually a pretty cool guy.' Then I'm like: 'So what've you heard about me?' But it's not necessarily what they've heard; it's just looking at me *at first*. I guess they must feel threatened or uncomfortable. I can play that to race I guess; and maybe the way I was dressing which was like 3X tee's and stuff like that, at that time, but that was the style, but whatever.

Joel described some initial friction between he and his teammates, at his elite university, in part from what he experienced as being "different". Whereas he had grown up in a working-class community, many of his teammates were drawn from the middle-to-high upper classes. Therefore he and his teammates noticed some differences between their interests, speech and dispositions (i.e. habitus) likely resulting from the different social milieu in which he and his teammates were raised.

> Joel: I felt I didn't fit in, just from my social demographic. Even the Black people didn't seem *right* to me, like you know? They didn't fit what I'm used to.

[33] The phrase translates literally from French to mean: 'the lived experience of the Black'

Joel and his teammates later became more accustomed to each other and formed relatively close bonds. But initially, his habitus may have made Joel seem like a 'parvenu'[34] and thus stand out as "different" among his peers at the elite university he attended. The ways class interacts with race may have led him to perceive the Black students as not "right" compared to his peer groups in the GTA. Yet, because participants were so focused on getting scholarships, playing basketball and going to university, many did not take into consideration racism they might experience when deciding to attend a university.

Social Life

Being "different" (i.e. Black and Canadian) in some ways influenced the relationships participants formed. Incorporating time to socialize was desirable if not necessary. Not only did participants want to meet new people and develop relationships, oftentimes they simply desired a break:

> Devon: ...You have your social life that you have to take care of, too, you know? Can't just be basketball and school all the time. You gotta have a little fun. So, it's just there's so many things going on at once, it's just, four years flies by.
>
> Kadeem: ...Outside of school and basketball [I would] have a social life. And that is key for anybody going to school. Having a social life and having that balance. Whether that was to chill with some of my teammates...here and there; I guess just a couple guys who I'm comfortable with.

The greater level of attention participants received on campus allowed them to meet people and make friends more easily. They were also afforded easier access to certain

[34] Translated from French a 'parvenu' is an individual who has recently entered the upper classes rather than being cultivated within them and thus stands out as different. (See Bourdieu 1984 cited in Wilkes 1990 p. 126).

parties and gained the favour of females if they so desired – something also aided by the unique status of being Canadian.

As initial comments which referred to stereotypes of Canadians subsided, participants were able to move past small differences and engage in intercultural exchange with American students. Some participants started to get more involved on campus and expressed particular intrigue in fraternities, something less prominent in Canada but a significant part of American college culture. Through these experiences, participants described gaining a cultural education, in addition to what they learned in their classrooms – all of which led some of them to feel that they got more out of college than their American counterparts or Canadian counterparts at home.

The participants who went to a predominantly white institution (PWI) described similar early encounters as the ones described above by Joel. Some students at the participants' PWIs came from schools with only a handful of racialized students and thus likely had limited experiences with racialized people beyond media representations. The "different experiences" participants had from many other White students at their colleges (likely based on upbringing and social milieu) meant that an exchange of personal experiences and lessons took place once both parties moved past initial prejudgments.

> Chris: ...the people I got to know, they learned from me just as much as I learned from them about their past situation, and their perspective about life and things they've been through. So, I think it's a good thing. 'Cause you see a different side of life. You hear about a different side of life.

All participants built new relationships, with their teammates and other students. These relationships acted as a new source of social capital, especially in terms of their

teammates with whom they experienced many joys and hardships. Remembering these experiences, participants described having their horizons broadened by new perspectives and forging lifelong relationships, which were highlights of their university careers.

Being a University "Student-Athlete"

Sports is a Business: "They own you bro. They own you"

As participants acquired the resources they needed to succeed, they began to transition out of being "fresh" and started getting settled into their academic, athletic and social roles. Within the first few weeks and months, participants had a better sense of the expectations placed upon them. They no longer experienced "the royal treatment" bestowed upon them during their recruiting visits. Instead they were ordinary college athletes like all of their teammates. Kadeem reflected on this change referring to what he called "the game":

> ...Division I, it's a business first. ...[At recruiting visits] they act so that they can get you into their world and make sure you're taken care of: transportation is fine; your food is being good; you know, you're hanging out with the guys. Everything is safe. You had fun. They make sure everything is according, so you can sign to that school. And after that, you sign and you're there, you get to know the real world, yea. (chuckles). Yea, Yea. It's not all fun and games anymore. It's not all fun and games after that.

As Kadeem and other participants suggested, one of the greatest distinctions between their high school experiences in Canada and college in the United States, is that major college sports is a business first. The theme of "the game'" synonymous with "the politics of basketball" (Darryl) was often intertwined with the understanding of "sports-

as-business"; these themes permeated multiple realms of the participants' college experiences.

Coach as Boss

The demands of playing basketball, on top of academic obligations, were described by most participants as "like a full-time job". Accordingly their coaches came to be seen as bosses[35]. This understanding was likely derived in part from the status their coaches held as influential people on campus:

> Junior: [Coach] was the big man on campus. ... At DI, you don't see your coach that much, sometimes. ... Like in your high school, you see your coach and shit. College coaches? Hell nah. ...They're in the meeting room; they're going all around the place, doin' a bunch of shit. Shit, you'll be lucky enough if you see your head coach like three times in one week, outside of practice.

The reverence Americans have for sport (something many participants noted as different compared to Canada) may have contributed to the status their coaches held.

Another contributing factor to the "coach-as-boss" perspective was the significant influence coaches hold over the athletic and academic fates of players. It was clear to all participants that the coach's job was not necessarily to be their "friend" but to win games, and handle the business of running a college sports team:

> Chris: ... My coach was a yeller so he's always yellin'. He's only happy when we're winning. It's a business for him. If he loses, he loses his job. So you don't really take that into consideration. Like coming from Canada, all your coaches are doing it out of the goodness of their heart. They're not getting paid. So if you lose ... they care, 'cause they're competitors, but it doesn't really affect them. So

[35] While such comments would not surprise many critics of US college sport and the NCAA, they are interesting to note, especially considering the consistent efforts of the NCAA to downplay any such types of relationships, and their implications (e.g. worker's comp, benefits, financial compensation), by employing terms such as "student –athlete" and emphasizing the academic benefits of an athletic scholarship (see Branch 2011; Staurowsky and Sack 2005).

> they're not like cursing you out and threatening you with stuff and saying: 'I'll take your scholarship away.' My coach never said that to me but I heard him say that to a couple people (chuckling). So it's like, you're not exposed to coaches [hounding] you like that.

This relationship is in stark contrast to their experiences with their former community, club and high school coaches and is not always made clear to players during the recruiting process. Nevertheless, coaches expected athletes to adhere to rigorous schedules and remain academically eligible. For most participants this meant mandatory study halls, and having limited and sometimes no trips home during holidays. Failure to meet expectations resulted in consequences – often times extra study hall, waking up early to run and limited to no leisure time[36].

However challenging this new relationship may have been, it was likely not their greatest concern as "student-athletes". Chris' comments point to two other interrelated details not commonly considered. First, the amateurism myth – that college athletes play simply for the love of the game – does not always hold. All of the participants did describe with great passion, their love for the game of basketball and drive to improve their skills. But love was not their sole motivation to participate in college sport. As Chapter 4 suggests, there is often the desire for a professional basketball career and the ability to "play on the big stage" (i.e. the NCAA and NBA) or at least acquire a "free" post-secondary education.

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[36] It's interesting to note that academics and intense physical activity would be used as punishment – something that may contribute to athlete burnout and dropout from US college sport. It would be interesting to explore if having such regimented schedules might have the effect of coddling athletes and limiting their abilities to learn to manage their time independently. Furthermore, having strict schedules appears to not significantly alter the workloads (i.e. athletic and academic demands) of athletes that may have led to their grades slipping in the first place, therefore failing to address their original "unacceptable" behaviour.

Second and related to the first point is that an athletic scholarship is tenuous – something suggested by previous research (Gilgunn 2007; Wells 2009). Underperforming (i.e. not producing), academically or athletically, could lead to the removal of a scholarship. Although "full ride" 4-year scholarships are often promised to high school athletes, the reality is that scholarships are renewable yearly at a coach's discretion.

> Junior: ...It's a business....Each year you start provin' yourself on the court, and then they re-sign you on the scholarship. (Others agree) ... [U]ntil you do that, until you do that, you're like: 'Ah shit. I had a bad season, they might release me.'

Of course, if the scholarship were taken away, the ability to pay highly priced "out-of-state" tuition at private institutions would be unlikely. The consequences of being released involve the loss of an opportunity to complete academic and athletic training (without incurring significant debt) that participants hoped would lead to a future professional career – athletic or otherwise. The knowledge that their scholarships could be lost was for some a source of both motivation and anxiety.

Politics of Basketball

As much as they were a source of support and kinship, another stressor participants encountered associated with playing in university was getting accustomed to their teammates. This adjustment meant participants had to deal with 'politics' within their teams in various ways. With the goal of 'going pro', trying to get noticed, and develop one's skills, teammates could also become competitors. Kadeem experienced an early coaching change at his university, which added pressure for him to 're-audition' and prove himself to not only his new teammates but also a new coaching staff that did not

have the same obligation to him. He described favouritism being shown to other players brought in by the new coaches, and thus working doubly hard to earn playing time and respect.

Other participants noted experiences similar to Kadeem's with coaches setting up certain drills for the starting players to have an advantage and witnessing all-star selections based more on how well-liked a person was than their actual skill. Joel echoed Darryl's comments in Chapter 4 regarding the importance of knowing people with "the right hype" and spoke poignantly about the effects of politics on who receives athletic scholarships in the first place:

> Joel: ...Experience-wise, yes [playing on a scholarship] was great; competition-wise it was also good. But there's times where I'm sitting, like: 'I know guys from the neighbourhood that will crush some of these guys that have scholarships.' But it's just situations, and exposure and politics. That's where politics comes in. If you don't have the right person saying the right things, you don't end up where I am, right? So, it's just crazy.

Again, the experiences of participants challenged the meritocracy of sport discourse. And though they acknowledged the prevalence of politics and at times their distaste for it[37], paradoxically, most seemed still invested in meritocracy. This may have been a result of two things. First, by achieving a scholarship the participants were living proof of what their hard work had gotten for them[38]. Second, merit seemed to help them to continue to rationalize factors beyond their control (e.g. decisions of coaches), and bolster the self-confidence they would need in order to perform academically and athletically.

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[37] Without too much elaboration, participants would sometimes refer to situations that did not go their way or were out of their control as a result of "politics".

[38] As much as they acknowledged their supporting cast, some participants also noted that the phrase 'hard work pays off' is rather cliché but at the same time rang true to their experiences.

Similar politics in basketball also extended into the classroom. Some participants described the ease with which certain athletes could miss classes in the US college system. Athletes who were highly recruited or highly skilled would get a "pass" and have few repercussions for missing classes:

> Kofi: ...When I went there, to my school, I was goin' to all my classes, all the time. People are like, "Why you go to class so much?' ... [I'm] like: 'Are you serious?' [They said]: 'We don't do that here.' That's what guys on my team were saying. Certain guys would get caught, not going to class, and coach wouldn't say nuthin'. [Coach would] pull 'em aside: 'This and that. Try to go back to class.' 'Cause we got four guys, in that same class, and three guys is missin', but coach only get mad at one dude. That's what used to happen. Depends who you are on the team.

The effect of being "student-athletes" was double-pronged. Because stories like Kofi's are so prevalent, and such practices are sometimes accepted quietly in universities, most participants employed image management strategies. Aware of 'dumb jocks' stereotypes (not to mention stereotypes of Black male athletes) at least four of the participants would try to counter these stereotypes by, for example, making a point of introducing themselves to professors and participating actively in classes. Yet, all participants also cited receiving minor perks[39] and, as noted above, having some professors who were more lenient at times.

Perhaps the most obvious element of the 'politics of basketball' is the money that flows through US college sport. As players, most participants had limited understandings of the inner logistical workings of the college sports industry. Some participants spoke with trepidation about the capitalist side of being on athletic scholarships:

[39] The participants still had to hand in assignments and write tests but could sometimes do so at a different time if they were traveling for games.

> Joel: ... College basketball is just a crazy system. It's just so crazy. There's a lot of money and a lot of, like I said, a lot of politics that go into it, so. I don't know. But...I'm only in the basketball player side of it, so this is from what I see. I don't know really what goes on, on the coaching side or the athletic director side. It's probably even more politics than I know of.

How much money was being exchanged, and between whom, was rarely made explicit to the players who provide the labour to make the product (i.e. sporting spectacles for television, ticket and memorabilia revenues). Despite this, participants were acutely aware of the significant amounts of labour – athletic, academic and otherwise[40] – they had to contribute to be able to continue to hold their "free" scholarships.

Playing on "the Big Stage" in the NCAA

For all the expectations participants had of life at a US college and playing in the NCAA, their game time experiences did not disappoint and was often cited as a high point. Being a college athlete provided participants many privileges not afforded to other students. Traveling and experiencing a new environment were significant reasons to go to the States on athletic scholarships and the participants had opportunities to travel around their cities, regions, and states; they stayed in hotels and ate out at restaurants; they often played to packed arenas against a high level of competition – experiences which gave them great excitement and joy. Even though not all participants played in high-major Division I schools, some played in conferences against bigger schools and others played

[40] Most participants gladly expressed having no contact with boosters and limited contact with university alumni. Alumni would usually just come to games and support the players. However, Kadeem did have to meet boosters, whom he was told, helped to fund his scholarship. He was grateful for their support but expressed frustration at not always having his own time, and sometimes having to be at the beckoned call of coaches – even when a certain event was not on the team's schedule.

in sold out smaller arenas that could still give the feel of big-time college sport during an intense rivalry. Joel recalled playing against one of the better teams in his conference:

> ... We played at [Big U] when they were number one in the nation. That was a rush 'cause...their stadium is built like the NBA.... So you walk in, the lights went off, crowd starts yellin'; you can't hear anything but the crowd. The floor's shaking and you look up at the ... scoreboard, but it's like an NBA one. Then it has their intro that shows them with different highlights and each person comin' out. And they have the 'Requiem for a Dream' music playing: 'Den dun dunna da nuh da na'. And everybody's like: 'haaaaaa', going crazy. And then you're sitting there and you have no choice but to be excited 'cause it's so electric. It's *sooo* electric. And this is during one of their days where it's no school, it's during the winter break and there's seventeen thousand people in the crowd. So you're just like, how you supposed to feel about that? There's seventeen thousand people that came to see us. They didn't know who we were but they came to see us, right? And then... we're on ESPNU, so that's not really watched; we're winning the game by nine with four minutes to go, now we're on every television station, sports-wise, in the nation: ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU. We lose the game but then we watched ESPN the next day and they're talking about the game, like: 'The refs blew the game.' Da da da da da. So we're like: 'Yo! We're in the paper.' Everything. I'm just like: 'Yo, this is amazing.' I left the game, I remember just looking at my phone, there's like forty texts, seven missed calls. Just like: 'Wow. That's how many people watched the game.' So, it was good. It was pretty intense.

With such experiences and a spectacle made of them, the appetite for more is understandable. The highly commercialized nature of major US college sport provides athletes with a taste of what being a professional basketball player is like.

However, not all games were this exciting. The level of competition can vary greatly within conferences and participants described playing certain games as a mere formality. As Joel continued the above quote, the "basketball-as-job" metaphor re-emerged:

> ...Like certain games were pretty intense. Other games were just like, goin' to work type of thing. You just punch in, do what you have to do, shake hands and you go and change and go home.

Even though not every game was as intense as the next, being a college athlete in a major US sport garnered participants a level of notoriety on their campuses to which not all were accustomed. Participants cited becoming "representatives" or "the face" of the school and – for better or worse – being noticed on campus more readily:

> Darryl: You're just noticed because, that programs gets the most money; they get the most gear; they get the most attention. So it's like everybody wants to be a part of the attention.... So once again like we had that attention. We were the focal point of our school.

> Devon: When you have people following you, knowing everything about you before you even step foot on campus, [it] is a little different. But you get used to it. Enjoy it. Embrace it. You gotta keep a good image when you're in the public. That was something that we had to learn as well.

As Devon suggests, this new attention could be enjoyable but it came with responsibility. Not only were they more aware of their "student-athlete" status in classes, in order to maintain a "good image" they had to think differently about the way they carried themselves in the university community and city.

Achieving the Balancing Act: Being a Successful Student and Athlete

After the first year or two, things started to get better as participants learned to manage the balancing act of being athletes and students. From this point on, participants often described being more settled at their universities and really starting to enjoy themselves and the relationships they were forming.

> Chris: ...At [my university], even when it was rough for me at first, it wasn't like constantly rough. I'd have good times and have a spurt where it's like, 'Shoot I

> miss home.' Or 'Shoot, basketball's tough right now' or 'Shoot, school's getting tough'. But then there'll be times where I get my grades get back, it's like, 'I killed this test. I had a good game, had a good practice.' So it was like up and down ... and then after the two years, it kinda of just steadied off to just being good.
>
> Kofi: College is the most fun time of my life, especially when you start masterin' the routine (other's agree); ... when the routine gets easy for you...
>
> Junior: Oh my gosh. Yup
>
> Kofi: ...And the coach likes you, respects you, let's you do what you do. ...It's a walk in the park.

Most participants understood college as an overall life experience, not simply about basketball and classes. Therefore, their approaches to balancing their various roles (academic, athletic, social) were quite pragmatic. The busy schedules kept by college athletes who have to juggle school, sport and socializing mean that eventually a ball may drop. Many of the demands they faced would conflict (see Adler & Adler 1991; Miller & Kerr 2002) and thus they sometimes sacrificed performance in one role to account for another.

> Devon: ...You know it's pretty tough to adjust but, you just learn, you're gonna mess up. ...Some people might be late to a practice or late to a workout. You're gonna take your 'L'[41] somehow. ... I just think taking care of what you *have* to do, before what you want to do, is key. (Kofi: Huge) 'Cause, you know, nobody's gonna tell you to always stay on top of your work, but when the test comes, you know you're grades are gonna show. So you can't really mess up with that. So the way you gotta take care of it is what you should be doing *first,* and then everything will fall into place.
>
> Joel: ...I worked for every grade I got. I stayed up; [there were] days where I never slept – like everybody else – to get the grades I got.

[41] 'L' is shorthand for 'loss', which should be interpreted here as making a compromise. Engaging in one activity may result in another activity or responsibility receiving less attention.

Some expressed finding this balance as "easy" but most described it as a delicate balancing act. Many explained having to change their habits, in order to be successful:

> Chris: ...You have to live a certain way. You can't just be out there being reckless and partying all the time, and doing all that kind of stuff.
>
> Desmond: You mean you can't? [sarcastically]
>
> Chris: Yea. You can't do that. No way. [laughing]. ... I don't know, there's some kids out there think: you're gonna get a scholarship, it's gonna be girls all the time, and if you're not practicing you're gonna do your homework in like an hour and then go out and party all night. It's definitely not like that.

While Chris' comments belie some common conceptions of college sport, for him and most of the participants, transitioning to university required much more dedication, focus and discipline. At times they would sacrifice sleep to study or socialize, and other times sacrifice going to class to make up for that lost sleep.

And as reported in other research (see Gilgunn 2007) being scholarship athletes meant sport rarely took a backseat to academics. So "taking an 'L'" would at times be in the classroom:

> Devon: I was getting 80 percents ... [at first]. Then when the coaching change happened, you know I put a lot of energy into basketball, 'cause [coaches] were demanding me to be a leader, you know, the main guy; ... And, I really bought into that. And I kinda let my grades slip. So I fell into, academic probation. It's not too serious, it's just something where you get more study hall, I guess. And you have to meet with different committees in the school just to see, if you're doing your work.

Even though most described the balance as being fairly equal, many of the experiences of participants beg questions of the balance of the "student-athlete" label.

"Sticking it Out" and "Getting the Degree"

Despite the many challenges participants had in finding balance, all participants completed their undergraduate degrees. I was unable to find individuals who came back to Canada without finishing their degrees in the U.S., though many of the participants contemplated leaving at some point in their university careers. The factors that contributed to participants completing their degrees may be instructive; for a variety of reasons, it was clear to the participants that they were not leaving their universities if they did not "get that degree".

Supportive Coach

The participants' college coaches were instrumental in helping two participants to complete their degrees. Chris developed a good relationship with his coach, and the support his coach showed for academics – part of the reason Chris chose to play under him – helped him finish his degree. For Junior, his coach pushed him to go beyond just staying eligible:

> ...I always made [the academic eligibility] requirements; you have to keep a 2.5 GPA. Kept that. That was easy. But my coaches wanted me to keep a 3.0, like: 'Why do you want to underachieve?' And I was like: 'You're right'.

Additionally, Junior described his coach's understanding of the degree as part of a contractual obligation – partly to keep his word, and in part to have a good athlete graduation rate for his, and the university's, reputation:

> ...When [coaches] recruit guys... coach comes to your house, he tells your mom: 'Don't worry; we'll take care of him. 100 percent graduation rate. All of our guys graduate.' When you're a senior, you play your last game, coach is like: 'You're in grind mode right now. How much credits – they call it hours, they don't call it credits – how many hours you need to finish?' You tell him. [Coach says]: 'Alright cool. Finish up the semester, I got summer for you and then that's it,

> you're done. ...I said you're gonna graduate, that's my promise to you, you're done.'

The focus was usually on simply completing their degrees, but participants reported graduating with average to above average grades.

"Bust", "quitter"

Most participants expressed a distinct distaste for quitting. As noted in Chapter 4, being known as a "quitter" or "bust" was undesirable. Participants had heard of individuals who had returned to Canada without degrees and did not want to be part of those statistics. For the participants, these labels were negatively associated with notions of weakness:

> Joel: ...I couldn't bring myself to quit. 'Cause I don't like quitting. I don't like the negative connotations that come with quitting. Like: 'That guy's a quitter. He gave up. He punked out.' These are the things that come after you say I'm done. I couldn't do it. I just had to fight it out.

> Darryl: A lot of people like to, transfer. Go to other schools and have an excuse. ...I'm not a fan of excuses. You make this decision. You stick with it. If it goes wrong then you gotta do your best to make it right. Or just get the best experience possible.

The ideas of "sticking it out" or "finishing what you started" reverberated amongst participants. Having worked so hard, they refused to let down themselves and the many people who had supported them throughout their youths.

> Devon: ...My junior year...in second semester, I just realized that you have to do [school] for yourself. You know, people are gonna demand a lot of you, but you still have to take care of what you gotta take care of. Yea, my first semester in junior year, kinda lost track of that, but after that, the grades were about the same all the time, about 3.0.

> Kadeem: ...My supporting cast,...they want [their kids]... to come back with a piece of *something* to validate that you actually went to school, got your education, two thumbs up. Instead of you going to school and coming back and [they say]: 'You didn't graduate? Why not? You got a free education, why didn't you graduate?'

The participants felt accountable to themselves and their supporters who invested time, and energy in them. The "no quitting" attitude (i.e. habitus), that was instilled in them while they were pursuing a scholarship, appeared to persist. Successfully fulfilling the academic and athletic requirements to receive a scholarship appeared to have contributed to their insistence on following through and obtaining their degrees.

Scholarship as Gift

As Kadeem's quote suggests, the fact that a scholarship was "free" played an important role in their determination to complete their degrees. In the group interview, I was curious to know what drove participants to complete their degrees, making them different from some scholarship recipients who do not. Kofi's response suggested not finishing a degree as wasteful.

> Kofi: You have a five-course meal and you only touch four courses. Why you want a five-course meal for? (Others agree) ...That's what these [other] guys do. They go down [to the US], they get caught up in 'the life'. They think: 'Oh it's too hard. I'mma go back home.' They quit. Those guys are quitters.

Kofi's quote points to the ways an athletic scholarship is represented as something extravagant, unique and to be coveted – almost as a gift that the participants should be grateful to receive from benevolent universities. In the face of the contradiction of their own experiences (e.g. basketball like a job, basketball as a business) scholarships were

understood as "free", providing the impetus to treat scholarships as opportunities to not be squandered.

Upon reflection, the majority of participants understood that they were being "used" by their universities, and thus were adamant about using the university, too.

> Kadeem: Make sure you milk, all that you can milk. So, whether that's gettin' socks, whether that's getting gear, as much gear as you can; whether that's, when you're travelin', you gettin' food – 'cause when you travel you go to all these big time restaurants.... Big thing [for me] was to graduate. 'Cause if you're using me, I gotta fit in my degree.

Furthermore, participants had to pay some money – either their own or their parents' – for traveling to and from school and did not want to waste these resources.

> Junior: ... whenever you go down to the States, that's me paying my money for a plane ticket to go down there. ... I pay my money to go back down [to the US]. I'm like: 'Yo, I'm not tryin to come back without my degree.'

Plan B

While it was clear that participants invested heavily in basketball, the fact that academics were a mandatory part of obtaining and then completing a scholarship, helped all of them to realize that there was life beyond basketball as Chris explains:

> [Academics] made me realize there's more than just basketball. Like, basketball's something I *like* to do but academics is something you *need* in life. And I realized that. I might not have realized that if it wasn't for basketball and people around me but, yea, you need academics.

With this understanding came the necessity of something that all participants referred to – a 'Plan B' based on their academic credentials:

> Kadeem: ...You would always have to have a back [up] as basketball players, you know? Have that 'Plan B'. If you might get injured along the way, you never

know what you might have to fall back on. So, having that degree it means that you can actually pursue something else outside of basketball.

Devon: ... You know [a degree] is gonna be beneficial to you, eventually.

Kofi: Exactly.

Junior: It's not that far either

Devon: Yea ...obviously everyone has aspirations to play after college, but that's only gonna last so long (Kofi: Exactly). You gotta fall back or rely on something eventually. And then, you know, if you're in a position to get a degree or a master's you might as well. ... Lookin' in the future [a degree] is always gonna help. So, that's the reason why I kept going back, and that's why I finished.

Some participants came into university almost certain that they would be done playing after college and with their eyes set on a profession. Others came to this realization after their first few years in college. Playing against projected NBA-cailbre athletes had differing effects for each of the participants. For about half of participants, having a better idea of the level of skill and ability they had to reach for a professional career – NBA or otherwise – pushed them to train harder in order to play professionally:

Devon: ...Once I hit college, my first year, my coach already asked me: 'What do you wanna do with this; with this degree and with basketball?' I said: 'I just wanna be a pro. That's all. It's simple.'

For others, seeing this competition made it clear that NBA was no longer a realistic goal:

Darryl: Once I got to university, I kinda noticed that I'm not the only good person playing this sport. You see how many other great talents are out there and then you start to realize that accomplishing your goal is like winning the lottery. So you gotta look for a plan B. Plan A doesn't always come through so, once I got to college, I started to plan for a plan B.

The ability to be realistic about life after basketball and start thinking of a plan B was common with these participants and was perhaps one of the most significant influences

for them to finish their degrees. In many ways, I think the determination and resilience participants described with respect to completing university is related to their networks of support. I develop this line of thought further in the Chapter 7. But, in essence, a combination of negative and positive motivating factors contributed to participants completing their degrees.

Personal Development and Growth

Reflecting on the ups and downs of their university careers, the participants described being satisfied overall, with their academic, athletic and social experiences. More than anything, participants explained that university was a period of tremendous personal development and growth. They gained new confidence and self-assuredness from the various travails they faced and successes they had.

> Kofi: You should apply yourself in anything you're doin'; that's the thing that college teaches you.
>
> Joel: At the end of the day, I can say when I was done I was proud of myself, in the sense that, so much was thrown at me where I could've quit, or I could've taken it a certain way and I rose above it.... I walked through the fire and I was burnt but, came out alive. So, that's what I'm really most proud of.
>
> Chris: I just feel like I'm more comfortable anywhere now. Like I could go anywhere and I'll feel like, I could make it here if I needed to.... I feel like I could go anywhere and be me. I know who I am.

It was common for participants to say things about their overall university experiences like: 'it made me a better person', 'I feel like I can do anything now', 'I grew a lot'. Moving forward to their lives after university they felt prepared to handle any future challenges they might encounter.

In fact, as Chris' comments suggest, having a strong sense of self, or sense of one's identity were cited as instrumental in being able to survive and thrive both academically and athletically in the US. The challenges they faced also led participants to express the need for mental toughness – something their experiences revealed or that participants learned to develop. As described throughout this chapter, participants had to navigate a number of changes when coming to university. Joel explained the ways some of these obstacles can become overwhelming if individuals are unsure of themselves.

> Joel: If you're used to being 'the man' all the time ... and then while you're in practice [coaches] are telling you: 'You aren't 'the man' anymore', it really messes with your mental. So if your mentality isn't strong – and you don't know... who you are inside – when someone's telling you who you should be and you believe it, but you don't want to, it's like an identity crisis. ... Some people can't stay with that so they just leave. Either finish basketball completely, or they do school hoppin'. They end up in all these different schools. Prep school, back; Junior College, back; back here. And this crazy maze of places, with no real accolades to show for it, right? So, I don't know. It's crazy.

At another point in our discussion Joel reflected on the idea of mental toughness and the advice he gives to aspiring scholarship winners:

> Joel: ... You have to ask them, are they mentally prepared to be alone. 'Cause there's gonna be times where you're going through some really hard times and you really have no one to turn to but yourself.

This mental toughness was inculcated in the participants as they pursued athletic scholarships in high school. Their abilities to draw upon it effectively, and demonstrate their capacity to do so, was tested in university and ultimately validated through the completion of their degrees. In this sense, having "passed the test" (i.e. successfully completing athletic scholarships in the United States) represented a major milestone in

the lives of the participants. This would explain the immense pride participants described in being able to 'stand strong' and their humble appreciation of their accomplishments. With this new sense of strength and accomplishment they could return to Canada as they prepared to transition into life after university.

Conclusion

The university experiences described by participants showed many of the typical aspects of being a University student-athlete in the United States. There were great demands placed on them to manage their competing academic, athletic and social roles. The business-like approach to major American college sport contributed to their athletic roles becoming overwhelming, leading to comprises in other roles (i.e. less attention paid to school work and socializing). Some of the particularities of being Black, Canadian and from working-to-middle class backgrounds augmented the athletic, social and academic experiences of participants. Ultimately, as participants adapted to their new environments, they described more enjoyable experiences and a focus on completing their degrees. From the ups and downs of being a university athlete, participants took away greater confidence in themselves and their abilities to move forward in their lives.

CHAPTER 6

The Post-Game: Coming Back to Canada

After university, the participants accomplished several major life goals. They pursued and successfully obtained US athletic scholarships; they 'made it', to play in the NCAA and they graduated from university successfully obtaining degrees. The next logical step in the predominant basketball scholarship narrative – something described by all participants – was to "get to the next level", in other words, play basketball professionally. However the participants followed two separate career paths. Four of the participants – Joel, Chris, Darryl and Kadeem – stepped away from the dream of playing basketball professionally, electing instead to try and establish a career. The other three participants – Kofi, Junior and Devon – continued with basketball, playing professionally.

I have separated this chapter into two sections: Life Beyond Basketball and Going Pro. These sections detail the experiences of the two groups of participants after university and the ways their life courses changed. By attending to the forms of capital available to them, I explore the factors that may have contributed to participants continuing to pursue or leave the dream of playing professional basketball. Importantly, these factors influence participants' self-perception as they re-assessed their career and life goals as well as future aspirations. The commonalities and differences in their post-university experiences are instructive. In the closing chapter that follows, I discuss the

overall life experiences of participants, including their own reflections, and suggest relevant implications.

Life Beyond Basketball

Those who stepped away from basketball decided at some point – before, during or just after college – that they did not want to play professional basketball. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, this stemmed from comparing themselves with American college competition and realizing that the NBA was not a realistic goal. By the end of university, some also felt as though their heart was no longer in playing professionally; the years of intense physical and mental exertion had taken its toll, or they had little left to prove. Perhaps part of the reason for leaving basketball behind is the fact that, as Chris suggested, any professional league that is not the NBA is considered less prestigious.

> Chris: [If] it's not the NBA where I'm making millions, and on the big stage, ... I'm not going to Europe to play basketball for, like, $40,000, where I could be at a job making $40 000 at home with my family...

The symbolic capital accrued from playing basketball appears to reach a peak at the NCAA level. The status, attention and media exposure are so great in the NCAA that only the NBA trumps it. Some participants even contested that the NCAA is more exciting than the NBA.

> Kofi: ... All the pro guys will tell you that – unless they're super mega-stars – they love college more than the pros. ... College, you have that atmosphere: everybody on campus knows you; the band is playing: 'bup da, da, da'. That's crazy. You can get beat by any team.

Romantic notions associated with ideals of amateurism suggest college athletes play with more, 'hunger', 'heart' and passion than professionals; college athletes are playing 'for

the love' and for a chance to 'make it' to 'The League' (i.e. NBA). Therefore, many basketball aficionados and college athletics enthusiasts argue the gritty style of play displayed by college athletes (especially on defense) is more exciting to watch than NBA athletes who are comfortable with multi-million dollar contracts. Playing in a professional basketball league outside of the NBA confers some degree of status, and is thus sought by some college athletes, including three in this research. But it is quite possible that, for the four participants who stopped playing basketball competitively, the sometimes meager symbolic status and economic capital acquired via professional athlete status was not 'worth it' enough for them to continue playing.

Furthermore, the path to obtaining a professional basketball career, outside of the NBA, is less clear than the path to an athletic scholarship. Whereas the 'make it to the NBA' narrative is fairly well entrenched[42], professional and semi-professional leagues are littered with many pitfalls as Joel described.

> Joel: ...I started the journey to [play pro] and – now that you're not in school and it's just you – it's a lot grimier [i.e. harder] than college is. If you don't have the right agent pushing for you, or you play in the wrong team, it may mess up your chances of going elsewhere. And I had some teammates go play pro in Europe; some got dealt really bad deals ... And I have a few that came back and they're like, 'I'm not playing basketball ever again. I'm done with pro.' And I got a few [teammates] that they're still down there trying to make sense of it.

As Joel suggested at another point in our conversation, it is hard enough to train at such a high level in US college basketball when one is receiving financial support, surrounded with the support of a group of like-minded peers, a university community and the

[42] E.g. be among the best basketball players in one's city; travel to the US to get exposure to college scouts; get recruited by college scouts; go on recruiting visits; obtain an US athletic scholarship; play well and build a reputation in university; declare for the NBA and find an agent; get drafted to the NBA.

excitement of the college athletics atmosphere (i.e. "surrounded by basketball"). It is even harder to train in relative isolation, and with less attention. One would continue preparing with the hope of a somewhat tenuous job as a basketball player, making a similar salary to that of any other profession in an entry-level position as Chris suggested.

Moreover, the large network of supporters who helped participants obtain scholarships likely had less experience with the professional basketball field, making it more challenging to navigate. From speaking with participants it seems as though they were largely, if not solely, responsible for negotiating their own ways through finding an agent who could secure them a playing contract. Three of the participants either had a shot at a professional athletic career, or played briefly, but then stopped. The fourth, did not pursue an athletic career, in part due to a nagging injury sustained in college. For these four participants, I suggest that the removal of significant sources of economic and social capital, combined with limited knowledge (i.e. cultural capital) about the field of professional basketball, converged with the limited symbolic capital accrued from playing professionally, influencing their decisions to stop pursuing a professional athletic career.

'Plan B' in Action

Not playing professionally meant transitioning from 'Plan A' (i.e. earning a living playing basketball) to what was referred to in Chapter 5 as 'Plan B' – using their academic credentials to gain employment. While the necessity of a 'Plan B' was clear to all of the participants – even those playing professionally – how well defined that 'Plan

B' was, was less clear. The "student first, athlete second" mantra that pervades most intercollegiate sports often presents the imperative to "get good grades" and "get the degree" but rarely goes beyond this simple advice to a better-developed plan.

Clarifying their 'Plan B' was something all four of these participants had to grapple with at some point. This was especially true for Kadeem who had most recently returned from university in the US and from a short stint playing professionally. During our interview he sounded very solemn and contemplative. At times he appeared to be thinking through his next life steps.

> Kadeem: ...Having to alter and transition into 'Plan B' when you never really ... put too much thought into 'Plan B'; it was just, it *looked* good, almost. Like ok, you know, become a teacher. But what is it gonna take to become a teacher, type stuff. General. So I'm transitioning from 'Plan A' to 'Plan B' right now and it's interesting.

Similarly, Darryl described a transitional period he went through when he first returned to Canada. Describing himself as a "lost guy after university", Darryl had this to say:

> I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do [when I came back to Canada]. And when I was looking for jobs in marketing, ... there's no job where I'm just like: 'Yea. I'm a marketer'. ... And if it is, you gotta know somebody that's really high up, and it's tough to get that position.

Comments such as these suggested that limited career planning took place when participants chose and completed their degrees. In fact, the way most participants spoke about it, simply receiving a degree appeared to be 'Plan B'[43]. Furthermore, it would

[43] I should note here that I did not interview non-athletes to compare for any differences in career planning. But when I reflect on my own experiences, and the paths of some of my university classmates, I think many followed a similar path, with "getting a degree" in and of itself acting as a "Plan B".

appear that the cultural and symbolic capital conferred by a university degree are insufficient to guarantee its proposed benefits (i.e. employment).

The importance of social capital in their post-university careers was implied in Darryl's statement. Losing or having diminished social capital was cited as something Joel did not predict before leaving for the United States.

> Joel: ... Because I've been gone for so long, I have no connections [at] home. So when I showed up home trying to get back in the scene, I'm starting from ground zero. Rather than people that have stayed [in Toronto] their whole lives, they've met people; they have numbers and connections.

It seemed most participants were not as ardent in their preparation for life after university as they were for their preparation to obtain a scholarship to enter university[44]. This may not be surprising if we recall the many demands placed upon them in university. Additionally, two participants pointed out that job experience as one of the many sacrifices necessary to pursue and obtain a US athletic scholarship.

> Joel: I didn't get my real first job 'til I graduated university cause I had to give up so much time to practice. And there's no work place that's really flexible enough for you to be, like, working maybe 10-15 hours a week and be on call. Like: 'I can't come, I gotta go [to play] on the weekend.' So I had to give up making money and getting nicer things in order to hone my craft I guess.

> Kadeem: It's not the basketball world you're in. You're in the real world now. ...You playing basketball means nothing; you havin' those accomplishments mean nothin'. You have no experience in the work field; you're starting new. You're lookin at a resume like: 'What have I done?', in a sense. And [work experience] is what jobs or careers look at, in the real world.

[44] It should be noted that at the time of our interviews many of these participants were entering the job market following the recovery from a major economic recession (ending in 2009), which has affected employment opportunities for many Canadians, especially young adults.

In hindsight, for these two participants having less employment experience meant not being able to build their resumes as youth – a potential hindrance to future employment. These comments suggest the capital acquired in athletic fields can sometimes have limited transferability to the employment field, or as Kadeem said: "the real world". Skills like 'teamwork', 'leadership' and 'discipline' are often touted as positive and transferable attributes that youth can attain through sports. Yet, lacking the attendant practical work experience (forms of symbolic and cultural capital) can limit the proposed benefits.

Using the American Degree

Overall, the participants expressed satisfaction with the educations they received, whether or not it guaranteed them immediate employment. Chris, who did find full-time work in his community, described the opportunities his degree provided him.

> Chris: I think [my education] was good. It hasn't held me back from doing anything I wanna do, academically here [i.e. Canada].... It set me up nice for any future that I want to go with here in Canada or anywhere else. ... It left me with a lot of options, so that's a good thing.

Similarly, the other participants described enjoying the things they learned in their courses and that their education was "good".

However, there were caveats for at least two of the participants. Some of the challenges posed by balancing academics and athletics in college made it hard for Darryl to take full advantage of his university academic opportunities.

> Darryl: I kinda wished I took school more seriously in university; I applied myself more. 'Cause there's a lot of things I gotta re-learn; when they speak about things

> in class [at teacher's college] I gotta re-learn 'cause I wasn't able to manage everything at once in university.

On the other hand, Joel who graduated with honours from a top academic university found that even his highly reputable university degree was not as well known in Canada. He described times that his American degree posed a problem in interviews with employers.

> Joel: What I've learned – and I think a lot of people [learn] that go across the border and play a sport or for whatever reason do school across the border – ... when you come back here [i.e. Canada], wherever you go [the degree] doesn't weigh the same here; no matter where you went [to university]. Unless [the degree] says Harvard or Yale. ... You know sometimes you get passed over.

When the time came to put their degrees to use and test them in the employment field, the participants had varying experiences. Three of the participants found some form of work relatively quickly. Joel started right away substitute teaching, a job he obtained via his high school coach. Chris and Darryl also found employment, but after a year or two, decided to go back to school to obtain teaching credentials. And, at the time of our interview, Kadeem had just quit a job and was pursuing entrance into a teaching certification program.

Determining the value of their degrees, and the transferability of the education participants received, would require further research[45]. But these comments offer a

[45] The quality of degrees obtained by participants is hard to determine given the range of universities they attended and the programs they studied. Similar to other research (Gilgunn 2007), because all of the grades achieved by participants were self-reported, it is hard to assess how well the participants performed academically compared to athletically. This is not to suggest that the participants were dishonest, simply that further documentation (e.g. transcripts, course outlines, etc.) would be required to make more accurate assessments.

picture of the mixed benefits and drawbacks of education gained in the US while competing on athletic scholarships.

Giving Back

Coming back to Canada and looking for work also meant returning to the communities in which participants grew up. Feeling as though they benefited from their university experiences and had something to offer, participants expressed interest in working with youth and "giving back to the community"[46]. Following this idea, then it is not surprising to see that these four participants all expressed an interest in teaching or mentoring youth. When I spoke with Darryl and Chris, they both sounded excited to be going through teacher preparation.

> Darryl: I find joy in [working with youth] because, I love being around them. Which is weird because growing up, I really didn't like kids. (Desmond: Oh, no?) No I don't, I really don't. They're so annoying. But I've grown to love their annoyance. So, it's like them annoying me is like, me embracing them.

> Chris: I enjoy [teaching]. When I'm in class with the students ..., honestly I haven't been this passionate about something since I was a kid playing basketball. So, that's a good thing. I'm up late night doin' lesson plans; when I'm in class, I'm alert, I'm happy to be there. I'm just a TC [i.e. teacher candidate], I'm not even teaching yet. So, I feel like [teaching] is something I wanna do.

Aware of the sacrifices made by people in their support networks and the encouragement that was extended to participants during their youth, they felt compelled to volunteer or work in their communities in various capacities.

> Chris: I feel like [teaching] is something I wanna do. Or something similar to this, where it's very heavily youth involved and helping the youth out with their

[46] For further discussion of the theme "giving back to the community" see also James (2012a), Chapter 4.

> choices, 'cause a lot of teachers helped me out when I was younger. So it's only right you do the same thing for these youth comin' up, you know?

All participants shared the sentiment expressed by Chris. Those who were pursuing a professional athletic career had similar community-based aspirations but would have to delay the implementation of this ethos until the end of their playing careers, or their off-seasons, when they would have more time for such activities.

Participants' perceived obligation to community could be interpreted as an expression of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005). Darryl and Kadeem both described interest in being able to play a mentorship role to youth in their communities. They felt that the intimate knowledge they bring from their experiences could help youth to stay out of trouble and realize their goals.

> Darryl: ...A lot of children that feel neglected are usually children that have challenges at home, or have a passion in something ...; it's usually in athletics, and I can relate in certain areas. So I kinda wanna take that role on, being that type of mentor, or some type of guidance and that influence to them to be successful in life.
>
> Desmond – And so why do you want to work with them?
>
> Darryl: Because I found someone to work with me. And I turned out pretty good.

Kadeem expressed a similar desire as Darryl and said the following:

> Kadeem: I do wanna have a program or an organization ... where I am a life skills coach or a mentor to the youth; to the kids in the lower economic neighbourhoods that have no guidance; have no male figure in their lives; have nobody, a role model to look up to in a positive light of things. ... [I want to be] helping these kids know that education is important; helping these kids know that whoever they hang around with will influence you to do certain things in your life and make decisions that aren't necessarily good for you, or some that are good for you. ... I don't wanna see kids on the block anymore. It's not the way to live.

> Desmond: And why would you wanna do … some type of program like that?
>
> Kadeem: That's where my heart's at. I don't know. For some reason I think I have a calling to do something for kids. And having to grow up in the bad neighbourhoods and stuff like that, I know what kids go through, I know what kids look up to.

Converting Capital

Interestingly, for all of the participants except Joel, a teaching career was not their original career goal going into, or leaving university. When examining participants' experiences and the resources available to them, working with youth – as teachers and or mentors – would appear to be a fairly pragmatic choice for at least three interrelated reasons: 1) participants had the necessary skills, knowledge (i.e. cultural capital) and educational credentials (i.e. symbolic capital) to become teachers and mentors 2) teaching and mentoring facilitates the transition from their athletic identities to the development of other identities and 3) participants had role models from whom to draw experience.

After obtaining scholarships, playing in the NCAA and graduating with university degrees, participants acquired valuable cultural and symbolic capital that could be converted in the educational field. To become teachers they needed further academic training, something to which their university degrees afforded them access or in Joel's case, his degree provided, allowing him to acquire employment with the assistance of networks. Participants were recognized as scholarship winners in their communities giving them status (i.e. symbolic capital) among youth. Youth who aspired to win athletic scholarships or acquire a university education would likely look up to the participants as role models. The participants could share with youth privileged knowledge

and experiences of playing in the NCAA – the same way former scholarship winners had done for them (see Chapter 4).

> Chris: I'd just come in and ... try to talk to [players at my high school] from a player's perspective, like: 'I was in your shoes not too long ago.' ... So I felt like I could kinda help the coach, out. Not only with drills and all that, but also just talking to the players and getting them in a winning mindset.... And I kinda do it whenever I have time to ... whether it's helping a player out one-on-one, preparing them to go to the States, or coaching kids.

In this way participants could become sources of cultural and navigational capital (Yosso 2005, p.80) and were well positioned to see teaching and mentorship roles as attainable.

This trend was consistent for Joel who left teaching but was still committed to the community. Due to some negative experiences in school settings, he decided teaching was not a career he wanted to continue pursuing. Describing the ways school can be "like a jail" for some youth he thought he had a better chance of reaching youth through his community centre. Therefore, Joel decided to mentor youth there, and was using his degree to try and establish a not-for-profit organization. The teaching experiences he described suggest the ways that schooling institutions can sometimes alienate certain students and that stronger bonds between adults and youth can sometimes be created in more informal settings.

Taking stock of their skill sets, becoming teachers and mentors would appear to allow the participants to shift relatively smoothly into a new role from their former athletic roles. For three of these participants, coaching, and playing recreationally was the extent of their post-university involvement in basketball. Playing at such a high level in

college and returning to Canada to play recreationally could be disheartening as Darryl described:

> You get so used to [playing at 100%] that it's fun being competitive 'cause everybody's trying their hardest. And then you come back and you play [basketball] with guys that are just here to sweat, I get so frustrated playing sometimes.... And, it really makes me not wanna play anymore. So, it's like, once you're done university ball, it's done. It's done, man.

While this experience could be discouraging, some of the capital (e.g. cultural, social, aspirational, symbolic) to which participants had access are relatively convertible from the field of athletics into the field of education. The ways community organizations, schools and sports are often intertwined in the GTA could facilitate participants' ability to build upon the capital they already had available to them.

Furthermore, by stepping into a new position of authority and not having to entirely renounce their athletic identity, participants could still maintain a semblance of self, albeit in a different form. With less invested in their athletic identities, the imperative for participants to prove themselves athletically likely lessened.

> Darryl: Sometimes I just play other sports cause I've never played that sport at a high level, so I'm blending in now; now it's fun again.

> Chris: Right now I'm just a student. No athlete anymore. Used to be student-athlete now it's just a student. ... I joke around with a lot of people. I call myself a retired athlete (laughs).

> Joel: After you've played [basketball] at that high level and you play a little bit lower, it seems really, really easy. Now I just play just to be fit and sweat. (Desmond: That works). Yea, for now; 'til I can't jump. Once I can't jump anymore, I'll never play basketball again. My athleticism is what gives me my edge. So, once I lose that, I'll just sit on the sideline.

Participants moved on to other sports or returned to playing basketball either for fun or to stay in good condition for their health. And, as teachers and mentors, they would be able to direct more of their energies towards youth.

While the other three participants appear to have already transitioned to an identity outside of athletics this was something Kadeem was still negotiating. As he was going through a transitional period, Kadeem decided to stop playing basketball altogether.

> A lot of people looked at me as 'the basketball guy', you know? But to me it's like: 'I have an identity outside of basketball.' ... I'm going through that, bro; going through that phase.

Later on Kadeem described, with a degree of displeasure, the questions he received from people in his community who were surprised to hear he was done with basketball. It was as if some people expected him to play professionally. The depths to which one's identity can be invested in athletics suggest that stepping away from sport requires a careful (re)negotiation of life goals and aspirations[47]. Therefore, it is likely Kadeem also saw shifting to a mentorship and teaching role could be one way to preserve a semblance of self[48].

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[47] One of my greatest surprises during this research came from interviewing Kadeem. He was the first participant to express interest in asking me questions, effectively interviewing me for another half hour after his interview when the recorder had been turned off. While it was much more of a conversation than interview, our discussion centred on my life path, the ways I dealt with stepping away from playing basketball and how I came to my current, and future, pursuits and goals. As I told my story he mentioned something to the effect that: "We all have to face the embarrassment of turning away from ball at some point". He certainly seemed curious about this project but in a way, I feel as though he may have used our discussion to think through his next steps, and to take whatever he could moving forward.

[48] Indeed my own experiences with pursuing a scholarship in part led me to conduct the research for this thesis. I had the skills, knowledge, and some connections that could be applied to complete this project.

In seeking a way to shift from their predominantly athletic identities, it is likely that participants would model themselves after individuals they respected. Therefore, I would suggest the role models in the participants' network of support were influential in the decision to become teachers. Many of the coaches under whom participants played as youth were also high school teachers or mentors in their communities. Spending countless hours in close proximity to these coaches could provide participants with the experiential knowledge of the skills needed to perform those roles effectively. Coaches and mentors could act as a blueprint for participants, once more affirming the viability of teaching as a career option.

Considering these reasons for becoming teachers and mentors, the career paths of participants could be interpreted as evidence of both social reproduction and social mobility. They are using their athletic and academic skills and abilities in order to take on similar, if not the same, roles as their mentors. Rather than a predetermined path, the practices engaged in by participants over their lives endowed them with the habitus and capital to take on these roles. At the same time, the participants are working towards professional careers that might put them in a better situation socio-economically than their parents[49]. This analysis might provide a more nuanced understanding of the old adage: "those who can't do, teach". Rather: "those who have done, teach others."

Investing in the field of academia provided a new venue in which to focus my energies, while still engaging my experiences from the field of athletics.

[49] From the interviews alone it is difficult to determine the extent of social mobility achieved by participants, as they had not yet secured teaching jobs. Drawing definitive conclusions would likely require further analysis and interviews. Nevertheless, the trajectories followed by participants are interesting to note as preliminary observations.

Looking Forward

Moving ahead in their lives, the decisions of participants to look for careers outside of playing professional basketball appeared to be partially influenced by certain normative life stage imperatives. When I asked about their future life goals or what was missing in their lives, the following responses were typical among three of the four participants:

> Chris: I guess the next step's family and kids and all that stuff, right? I'm getting to that age where, I guess that's the next goal, for me is ... setting up a foundation where I could support a family and raise kids to be successful in whatever they wanna do. ... Whatever I do now is working towards that, eventually.
>
> Darryl: My current goal is to finish school. Find a job. My career goal is to maybe be a principal. And start a family.

Starting a family was also in the back of Junior's mind, though at the time of our interview, his professional athletic career took precedence. These four participants were in their early-to-mid twenties and were transitioning into "the real world". Being in "the real world" meant doing all of the things that adults considered to be successful are able to (e.g. own a house, have a career, support a family, be self-sufficient). All of their future goals were not yet fully formed but, where pursuing a professional playing career might be seen as avoiding transitioning to adulthood, it is likely that these participants preferred to focus on developing a more stable career.

At the end of our interviews, the participants seemed generally optimistic and positive about their futures. Though the future was unclear, the fact that they had already

been through several significant life events and transitions appeared to give them confidence that they would get through another.

> Joel: [I'm] Just trying to hopefully, either work for [a non-profit organization], or start my own. But I'm in a good space, mentally. And I'm glad I'm not satisfied, 'cause then that just means I'm done trying. So I'm pretty excited.

> Chris: Even through the negative stuff that happened in my life, I was able to learn from it, and – in some way, shape or form – it helped me for the situation I'm in right now. Hopefully, if I talk to you ten years, six years from now, I could say the same thing.

Describing how he accounts for the way his life unfolded, Darryl had this to say:

> It's like I was trapped in a cocoon and now I'm breaking out of it. I'm breaking out of that shell. And after this [teaching] program, hopefully I'll have my wings, and I can fly.

When they were athletes, their futures largely rested in the hands of other people – for example coaches willing to offer them scholarships. They would still have to rely on others for employment, but in a potentially less competitive field than that of professional basketball. With their educational credentials, plenty of life experience in hand, the participants likely felt a new sense of autonomy and thus optimism for the future.

Going Pro: Playing Professional Basketball

After graduating from university, the three participants who continued to play basketball followed a path that mirrored that of obtaining an athletic scholarship, but with some notable differences. Throughout their college careers participants played well and improved their skills. Because playing professional basketball was their main focus, they were in effect marketing themselves to later find work as athletes. As noted above, the process to becoming a professional is not very clear, and my knowledge of the process is

limited. However, Devon, who had recently graduated and turned professional basketball player, provided an explanation:

> I'm fairly new to all this, too. ... But coming out of school, agents approach you after your last game or so. Or they've been approaching your coach throughout the year – but you're not allowed to talk to them until after your last game. ... So [agents] start contacting you, and you ... cut down who you think you want, or who you don't want to represent you. You take meetings and kinda just make an ultimate decision eventually.... And then [agents] pretty much just place you; they shop you around to different teams. You might not get a deal right away.... But yea, that's pretty much how it works.

Obtaining a professional basketball contract sounds simple enough and, compared to university, these three participants had a relatively greater degree of control over their circumstances. They could choose who would represent them and what deals they would accept.

> Devon: You can fire your agent any time, and start over. And I found out that's pretty common (chuckles).

As professionals, participants dealt more directly with the business side of sports than in college. They learned quickly that professional basketball can be somewhat precarious employment. I did not ask about the fine details of their contracts, but from what the participants described, it sounded as though there is little job security and limited, if any, unionization. Whether or not they are playing well, the possibility that they would be released from their contract at any moment was ever-present.

> Kofi: I've been in countries where our big man is averaging twenty [points] and ten [rebounds]. He gets twenty-five [points] and eleven [rebounds] and a player you played against got twenty-six [points] and like eight [rebounds]. [Our big man] had a plane ticket home. And we won the game. And we were in first place, when I was in [Europe].

> Devon: They won't tell you [you're released] until they tell you what plane you're on.
>
> Kofi: ... I'm like: 'He had twenty-five and ten! So he's our leading scorer and rebounder! How we gonna lose him?' Next game we have to play [three former NBA players]; we got beat by thirty. Lost our best player. Two weeks later, I was home!

Indeed, comments made by Kadeem in our post-interview discussion followed a similar line of thought as Kofi's. In a reflective memo, I took note of Kadeem's comments, which suggest the insecurity of professional basketball contributed to his decision to stop pursuing an athletic career. In our post-interview discussion he said:

> People think that playing pro is so great. It's not stable. It's cutthroat. You can go from contract to contract and, like I was, you can just get released. Whereas, outside of ball, it's more stable; you still have to perform, and if you're not performing you lose your job, but it's not as much of a grind.

These experiences reveal a side of professional athletics – the instability – most youth who pursue professional basketball careers are unlikely to consider given predominant representations of professional athletes. I remember growing up and only thinking of the glorious and exciting aspects of playing professionally (e.g. the big crowds; being paid to play; traveling around the world). It would appear that when they were pursuing scholarships, the participants had similar thoughts. However, the experiences of these three participants suggest there is more to professional basketball than just fun and games.

In addition to having to worry about potentially being released, staying healthy emerged as a constant concern. As professional athletes, these participants relied heavily on labour derived from the physical work their bodies were able to produce. Their labour

– participating in and producing the spectacles that are sporting events – is exchanged for income. While there are likely clauses that provide some injury protection, being injured offers opportunities for teammates to step into another player's role – something that could become permanent upon the injured player's return.

In fact, being injured was part of the reason that Chris decided against a playing career. He described what he noticed as some athletes having a hard time "giving up basketball after university", whereas being injured made easier his choice to not play professionally.

> Chris: I hurt my ankle really bad…; it didn't heal properly but I could play with it. … So I just strapped on an ankle brace and played my last year [of university] with it. But I obviously wasn't the same player. So that kinda made it easier for me to just like really say: 'Forget basketball'. … You always have that second-guessing yourself like: 'Maybe I should give overseas a try for a year,' or something. But luckily, 'cause of the injury, that wasn't even a question (laughs). That really just put the icing on the cake for me not to try to go that route at all. And I was ok with that.
>
> Desmond: It's funny that you say that happened; it was lucky that injury happened (Chris: yea). Most people wouldn't want to be injured at all.
>
> Chris: At the time I didn't want to be injured. But it was a good thing that I did for my decisions for what I'm gonna do after university. … Even though I didn't have any desire to go overseas, just in case it even crossed my mind, it quickly just came out of it.

Perhaps, part of the reason these three participants continued to play basketball professionally is that they had not yet sustained any major injuries, which would impede their performance. They all described being in relatively good health, and thus confident in their abilities to improve and compete at a high level.

Still Chasing the Dream

For the participants who were still playing basketball, eking out a professional athletic career seemed to be simply another part of their dreams that they wanted to fulfill. Though all participants in this research described their love of basketball, for these three participants, their love of playing basketball and desire to compete at a high level did not waver. Their desire to keep playing seemed more persistent than those who stopped.

> Kofi: ... Basketball's an itch you can't scratch. We love this game. ... Basketball is my first love, period.
>
> Junior: [I'm] still in love with the game man. Like, I still like doing this ... I can still shoot, I can still play; I'm still athletic. So, you know, I'm gonna do it man.

These participants exhibited a durable athletic habitus and appeared to have a greater proclivity for professional basketball. They were insistent on 'getting to the next level' – even when that level was no longer the NBA.

I found it very difficult to discern what inspired this mentality, especially because they were not playing in the most elite leagues. Yet, this fact seemed to actually spur the participants on. They all felt as though they could be in better situations, playing against better competition in better leagues. Accordingly, they all described feeling as if they still had more to prove, and potential to realize, as athletes.

> Kofi: You have a certain time to maximize your potential playin' basketball. So, when you're done, you can be like: 'I was the best player I can be.' ... So why not get better?
>
> Devon: You know you [want to] play against the best players that you think you can. So, right now, we're not there, but that's why we're always tryin' to get better, every day. You know, the grind never stops.

Devon indicated that the participants continued to have to work hard, and prove themselves against professionals who had already built reputations and careers. As Kofi's earlier quotes suggests, they would compete with or against former NBA players. From when I was pursuing a scholarship, I remember how the importance of 'having potential' as a young athlete was impressed upon me by coaches. Having youth and potential means having the ability to eventually play at a higher level and thus being more attractive to basketball clubs (i.e. potential employers) – a point clearly not lost on these participants. Securing contracts to play professionally meant that someone saw potential in them. As with the athletic scholarship, they understood their contracts as opportunities to not be wasted.

The validation they received from their contracts was still not enough to satisfy these participants. Kofi had played in better leagues than the one in which he played at the time of our interview, and was certain there were better opportunities available, specifically to realize his earning potential.

> Kofi: There's money out there that you can get. .... This [league] is a pit stop. This is a joke. The money that you can get as [taller] guards; athletic; put [the ball] on the floor; can shoot [the ball]. Good IQ of the game. There's money out there for you. Endless money. It's about how you push yourself.

Devon, who was in the early stages of his professional basketball career, had one experience in Europe that also opened his eyes to the possibilities in pro basketball.

> Devon: When I realized that I can get paid for doing something that I love to do, I mean, why not try to get paid the most you can?

The many opportunities offered by playing professionally influenced these participants to continue chasing the dream of a professional athletic career. Being able to earn a living and enjoy traveling was desirable, and similar to the college experiences they previously enjoyed.

> Junior: As of right now, you know, same lifestyle as college. They pay for the housing, they give us a vehicle, pay us salary. ... So it's pretty good. You know, I like it; can get better though. I like it though, so far.
>
> Devon: I'm just trying to gain as much experience through [playing pro] and travel. That's why I think playing overseas, on different continents in the world, is available through basketball. So I think travelling is something that I find pleasure in. And visiting different countries, cities all over the world is something that I wanna do.

Similar to the participants who stopped playing, for these participants, their decision to continue playing basketball appeared to be fairly pragmatic. They were engaged in a career for which they showed great passion, in which they could imagine themselves – all while earning a living. Any loss in symbolic capital from playing a lower tier league seemed to be outweighed by their aspirational capital and perceptions of potential future economic capital. These participants were also optimistic about the future and looked forward to whatever adventures and opportunities playing basketball would continue to afford them.

'Plan B' on Hold

Continuing to focus on athletics meant that most of the participants did not have a clear idea of their post-basketball life plans. The continued, almost myopic, focus on basketball made it challenging for participants to produce an answer when I asked:

'Where do you see yourself in five years?' To my surprise, the following response came out in our group discussion:

> Kofi: To tell you the truth, five to ten years, you can't look that far (Others agree). You gotta look at what you're gonna do in five to ten minutes. (Devon laughs) To tell you the truth. 'Cause if you don't focus on that time, where you're in that space, you get lost (Devon: Exactly)

Kofi's response may have been somewhat exaggerated, but I think it speaks to the immediacy of having to perform on a daily basis to remain employed. Always having to focus on the next play or the next game might discourage professional athletes from looking forward to planning for their life beyond basketball.

When I inquired further in our individual discussions, Devon and Junior had general ideas of how they would use their degrees (Business Management and Physical Education respectively) to find future employment, but they were more focused on seeing how far they could go with basketball.

> Devon: You don't wanna pass up something that's fun over going to a nine-to-five job, and just doing the thing 'cause you have to make a little money. Gotta live your life having fun and doing what you wanna do. So, that's what I found basketball was to me. Something that was fun and it was something that I could see myself doing for a while.

It appeared that these participants would continue playing until they were no longer able or wished to. When it comes to the end of their playing careers, for these three participants, it seemed as though it was a bridge they would cross when they get to it.

Not having a clear plan did not stop participants from feeling confident about their abilities to enter into a career after basketball. When I asked them how they felt about the educations they received, the following responses were typical.

> Kofi: The education was good. But I feel like, for me, ... experience is better than education. A lot of people, they're book smart but they're not life smart (Other's agree). College, me reading those books, that stuff in the syllabus and [doing] all those readings and tests was ok; it was structured. Don't confuse routine with discipline. That's what people are doing. So when you get out of that [structure], and you're not doin' [school] no more, you lose most of that [information].... You forget some of the stuff, but you don't forget how to apply yourself in everything. So the thing [university] teaches you is how to be disciplined, how to apply yourself.
>
> Devon: You can't take away a degree from someone; what's in your head, what you learned. That's gonna be with you for life.

I think Kofi's comments are important and worth reiterating: "Don't confuse routine with discipline." While the schedules that participants kept in university were extremely regimented, they also had to be able to effectively manage those schedules to complete their education and perform athletically. The ability to manage several demands, and adapt to various settings in university, gave the participants confidence that they could apply the skill of "discipline" (perhaps a type of cultural capital) to any future employment situation they may encounter – athletic or otherwise. Their successful application of discipline may be what has separated them from some of their peers who have not completed university or gained professional athletic employment.

While my question may have been as much out of curiosity as concern, the responses of participants reflect a similar finding noted by Gilgunn (2007). Citing Jane Jacobs' (2004) discussion on credentialing, Gilgunn (2007) notes that for some of her participants, simply having a degree (the credentials) is perhaps of principle importance over "learning and self-betterment" (p. 51). Kadeem's comments suggest a similar understanding of credentials in describing the way inflation of academic qualifications

necessitates a bachelor's degree – if not more – for most entry-level jobs. When we were talking about his plans of returning to school, Kadeem said:

> [Speaking to me] I don't know how you're doing [more university] right now but I guess you have to, in the current situation. ...It's like master's degree is what's gonna get you in that door. So, in order for me to be a teacher I have to have that certification. So I have to go through the process.

The comments of all participants in this study suggest they were aware of credentialing at the same time that they valued the education they received. These three participants in particular appeared to be more concerned with their abilities to apply certain skills and discipline than to retain and regurgitate information from a given knowledge set. While we did not discuss any other activities they might be engaged in outside of their work as athletes, the fact remains to be seen if their athletic resumes will transfer to the employment field or if they will have similar challenges to some of the participants who stopped playing competitive basketball.

CHAPTER 7

A Retrospective: Reflecting on Life Experiences

At this point I would like to take a step back and look at the sum of participants' experiences to suggest some points for consideration. As our interviews concluded, my final questions to participants focused on having them reflect on the entirety of their experiences and the roles played by factors such as race, class and gender. In this section I draw on quotes from participants to reiterate findings from throughout this research and highlight some of their perspectives on their own experiences. In examining confluent and contradicting ideas, I point out some conclusions and direction for future research.

With virtually no research examining the role of race in the pursuit of US athletic scholarships by Canadian youth, I was curious to know the participants' views on the effects of race in their experiences. When I proposed to the participants that I think Blackness has something to do with the pursuit of basketball scholarships, and when I pushed them to answer: 'Why basketball instead of some other sport or activity?' the responses varied but had similar threads.

> Chris: I think that goes back to the question when you asked me what sports I played growing up. And I think a lot of Black males don't play too many other sports cause they're expensive. Basketball's a sport – no matter how much your parents make – you could play it almost any time...

> Joel: ... I could say Blackness is a part of it, as well as just the area or the community that you live in. Here's really big on basketball, so everybody's trying to win a scholarship for basketball. Maybe somewhere else it could be hockey, just to win a scholarship. But, I think it's just; there's just; I don't know. That's a really good question. But I think Blackness does play a part in it.

> Kadeem: ... I think this all ties into what I was saying with, you know how Black people are looked upon only as athletes; only as drug dealers; only as rappers and thugs. ... Your life is already painted. You know you being Black, like you're supposed to do that.

Admittedly, as Joel's quote suggests, some struggled to find an answer to this question. But I think the responses of participants point to the implicit ways race structures experiences in our society. Race and socioeconomic status interlock such that non-White people in the GTA disproportionately experience conditions of poverty and economic marginalization (Colour of Poverty 2007; Ornstein 2006). Therefore, Chris' comments suggest knowledge, and personal experience, that many Black male youth do not often have access to the financial means (i.e. economic capital) required to participate in more expensive sports (e.g. hockey, football) throughout their elementary and high school years (an experience common among participants).

And, in the Greater Toronto Area, racialized and working class people tend to become concentrated in certain neighbourhoods (Hulchanski 2010). Joel's quote gestures towards this fact. His comments, as well as those of other participants throughout this research, suggested that basketball provides an accessible, popular way for young Black males to gain recognition, and find friendship within peer groups, while concurrently trying to improve their social standing. These perspectives might explain why sports-related programs – particularly those focused on basketball – are so prevalent in certain neighbourhoods of major metropolitan cities and are used as a tool to engage "urban" (code for racialized) youth.

I think experiences described by participants are unique for working-class and middle-class Black Canadian males, due to the ways race and gender operate in our society and media – a point suggested by Kadeem. The limited representations of Black males in the media, in a few prescriptive roles, presents a narrow range of possibilities to which Black male youth might aspire (James 2012). Among those few role models perceived as positive are professional athletes and entertainers. As Junior pointed out, role models deemed to be positive receive exponentially greater attention in the wake of prevailing negative representations of Black people.

> Junior: 'Cause Black people get in so much trouble and shit, the little shit we do that's good, people are like: 'Oh shit'; [They're using] binoculars watchin'. [People say]:'That's so good' (claps hand) ... The whole community embraces it. ... They're all a hundred percent behind it, 'cause we only got a few people up there that we can just name off the top of our head.

With greater experience, about half of the participants acknowledged the prevalence of these stereotypes and all described the influence of the media in their pursuit of scholarships. Junior said:

> I even learned that in one of my [university] classes.... Most of our heroes, growing up are, fuckin African-American athletes. But personally, ...that's true man. ... . Michael Jordan.... Black people that rap or whatever, that's who you watch. People that's successful; ... those are your idols.

Though it may have been just one influence among others (e.g. peers, coaches), and was referred to only jokingly by one participant, about half of the participants referred to Michael Jordan, or another NBA player, as a role model. This research suggests that the media may have a role to play in providing a reference point for many of the participants to see themselves as more likely to be potential professional basketball players (as

opposed to a film director or physicist for example.). Moreover, with the extreme economical wealth one could stand to gain, a US athletic scholarship is seen as stepping stone to a professional athletic career and eventual upward social mobility (James 2005, 2010). Yet, the experiences of participants also point to the limits of such representations, which – when no longer tenable options – are supplanted by alternatives.

Colourblindness and Meritocracy of Sport

Despite the acknowledgement of some of the systemic barriers faced by Black males, I noticed an interesting tension in participants' perspectives of the influence of race in their own lives. When I asked participants about the role they think race played in their lives across various experiences (e.g. pursuing a scholarship, college, academic, athletic, etc.) multiple, and sometimes contradictory, perspectives were held between and within individual participants.

All of the participants expressed an understanding that racism and other forms of discrimination are present in our society. Some gestured to this understanding more subtly, others more explicitly.

> Junior: Some people look down on Black people for some reason. But, there's nothing you can do about it, that's them. You can only worry about yourself. And at the same time you can't be ignorant to that either.
>
> Devon: ... [T]here's a little disadvantage, obviously, from being a little darker; I think, prejudice, all that stuff, you know. There's still racism.
>
> Joel: Race is important. It does a lot, actually. It allows people to classify you, or put you in a certain group before they even meet you.

Yet, when participants reflected on their experiences, half described feeling as though they were unaffected by their race, or that they could not think of a time when race had a serious impact on them. Often, reference was made to their experiences as athletes.

> Chris: Basketball's a pretty African-American dominated sport so I was never like the minority on any team or anything. ... In terms of basketball [being Black] was never a bad thing. ... And basketball's a sport where, race doesn't really matter. It's whether you can play or not.

> Darryl: I feel like I was never faced with racism really. And in my culture and environment of basketball, it doesn't matter if you're Black or White. ... If you can play basketball, you can play basketball. If you're good, you're good.

As has been shown throughout this research, the meritocracy of sport discourse appeared to reign supreme for some participants[50]. Such discourses espouse sport as an egalitarian realm, which 'levels the playing field' ensuring that – irrespective of personal background and individual differences – the best athletes are given a chance to play.

> Devon: If you're White or Black, I'm not gonna be like: 'Ah he can't play. He can't do this.' because of who they are. I'll see it firsthand. 'Ok he could do this, he can't do this because, you know certain situations. Nothing because of their race. ... As long as we're competing and getting the best out of each other, doesn't matter.

What goes unacknowledged in these narratives is the various ways race, class and gender (among other factors) serve to frame and shape the resources to which individuals have access and the perceived opportunities available to them. Yet, because so much of the

[50] In discussing with a colleague, Rhonda George, the phenomenon of "not being affected by race", she suggested that the responses I would receive regarding the role of race in their experiences might be different if I were to ask athletes who identify as White or South Asian or identify in some other way. Indeed, some research has shown that the hegemonic understanding of basketball as a "Black sport" has led some youth to feel uncomfortable playing basketball because they did not see themselves as fitting in, or felt as if they were pushed out, not given the same support as their Black peers (James 2005, 2010).

lives of participants were wrapped up in sport, half of the participants described their experiences, by and large, as unaffected by race.

These perspectives might explain why participants described preferring to see themselves and others more as individuals than through stereotypes associated with social demographic factors. Therefore, it follows that, when participants described being affected by race, they mostly referred to instances of interpersonal racism (usually in the United States), rather than structural or institutional experiences of racism (see Chapter 5). Perhaps to be perceived as more egalitarian, and in hopes of being treated more equitably by others, they claimed to "not see race".

> Chris: Me, I'm just a people person. I don't really notice race and all that stuff. It doesn't matter to me; even the economic status. Yea, that didn't matter to me [in university], so I didn't pay no mind to that.
>
> Junior: I didn't look at race for real. I just started realizin' race [when] I got to the south [in the United States].
>
> Devon: Personally, I don't really look at [race to] judge somebody. I don't care whether they're whatever type of race, religion, gender; it doesn't matter. ... If we share the same interests, we'll be cool.

Comments such as these might be surprising given the multiple ways race came into play throughout our discussions. And, if we recall Chapter 5, these comments contradict the experiences some participants described with respect to learning from White students. Take for example the following statements by Junior and Darryl.

> Junior: I think that the different races that I've encountered helped me to widen my train of thought; be able to not be ignorant. 'Cause me learning about White people from Black people talkin' shit, versus me being in class with [White people] and just chillin' with them, that's two different things.

> Darryl: I don't have any problems with any race. People are people to me. I actually like branching out from different races cause you just learn so much; especially different religions.

Given these contradictions, a nuanced reading is required. It is clear that participants were able to "see" phenotypic qualities (e.g. skin colour), which are ascribed to race. However, their claims of colourblindness may be a result of individualism and meritocracy inculcated through sport. Additionally, throughout its history to the present day, Canada has been a difficult place to talk openly and publicly about issues of race and inequality – even for those affected by it[51]. Therefore it should not be surprising that some participants downplayed the importance of race, displaying what might be considered a 'polite Canadian sensibility'[52]. Knowing the impacts of discrimination, it is likely they would not want to categorize others with whom they came into contact. Moreover, the current turn in racial discourse means that those who speak of the ways race structures institutions and individual experience are liable to be labeled as 'racist' themselves[53].

The (Non)Influence of Race

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[51] Here I should also note that, as a stranger to the participants, it is quite possible that some of the participants were uncomfortable or unwilling to talk to me about intimate experiences of racism and discrimination.

[52] Recall in Chapter 4 the hesitation Junior displayed when describing the challenges his high school coach had in finding coaches that could see past his appearance and recruit him to a Junior College.

[53] See for example the work of Winant (2004): "The old recipes for racial equality, which implied creation of a 'colorblind' society, have been transformed into formulas for the maintenance of racial inequality. The old programs for eliminating white racial privilege are now accused of creating nonwhite racial privilege. The welfare state, once seen as the instrument for overcoming poverty and social injustice, is now accused of fomenting these very ills" (p. 167) and "To promote black (or brown, or red, or yellow) race 'consciousness' today is to invite criticism from whites -- and from those few nonwhites who have adopted the 'color-blind' stance -- that one is a 'reverse racist.'" (p. 33).

For those who spoke openly about the effect of race on their experiences, they made reference to some of the concealed or subtle ways race and racism works. Joel for example explained a substitute teaching experience where another teacher questioned his academic credentials. The teacher discovered Joel went to a prominent academic school as an athlete on a scholarship and claimed that Joel's status as an athlete – Joel would add Black athlete – meant he was awarded free grades. Even after graduating from college with honours, Joel had to contend with the 'dumb Black jock' stereotype[54] – a phenomenon experienced by other participants during university and described in Chapter 5. Joel preempted this story with the following statement about the role race played in his life.

> Joel: When I was younger it was more just harassment by police.... As I got older it was just a lot of prejudgment.... Now, as I'm older, graduated... I haven't seen race affect me as much in terms of employment or just walking down the road or anything. But, it's still there. Race still doesn't leave 'cause you can't look past the fact of my skin colour. So, I feel like it's a little more implicit; it's a little more hidden.

Some of the difficulty Joel had describing the effects of racism might also point to the malleability of race and racial discourse, such that race as a social construct has manifested in different ways throughout history[55]. As Joel said later in our discussion, people are not often aware of the times they are discriminated against[56].

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[54] As Joel noted, this story was made all the more curious in that, the teacher accusing him of getting free grades was Black, and another teacher who came to Joel's defense was White. His story suggests the ways that stereotypes can become internalized, and often know no colour lines.

[55] See for example the works of Banton (2000), Goldberg (1993) and Hall (1989).

[56] Joel provided the hypothetical example of the way an individual could be overlooked on a job application for not having a typically Anglo sounding name.

Kadeem described the role of race in his life meaning that he had to overcome many hardships and obstacles to reach his goals in life. In describing the racism he experienced in Toronto – similar to Joel – as "more hidden" compared to the United States, Kadeem said:

> It's really hard to explain. I guess it's still; you'd still see, the Black people in the lower communities. ... You still see that structure: the White people are just rich and they don't care about the people that are in low poverty, and neighbourhoods. ... The Black people aren't really excelling when they should; we have so much potential to.

Without always being able to precisely point to it, their comments suggest knowledge and experiences of systemic or institutional racism. Institutional racism thrives on avoiding the necessity to discriminate openly against individuals. Instead, for example, certain qualifications (i.e. cultural capital) and dispositions (i.e. habitus) are sought such that entire groups of people are effectively eliminated from consideration with no reference to their race, class or gender.

Joel described poignantly the ways systemic racism can cause Black people to sometimes feel as though "your back is against the wall" – even when it's not. Due to the perceived and real experiences of being racialized, Black people sometimes feel as though they must work harder than others to succeed.

> Joel: ... A characteristic of being Black is, at times, being aggressive and fighting for what you want, and grinding it out. Like – unless they're already rich – every Black person I've ever talked to, you ask them: 'What's goin' on?' [The say]: 'I'm grindin' man. I'm trying to get it together. I'm tryin to make a dollar out of fifteen cents.' These are cliché' saying sentences that I don't really hear White people say all the time or it's very rare amongst other races. But when I'm around Black people, that's what you hear. They're always tryin' to grind, or hustle or make something to get to that goal that they feel like they have to fight for.

Joel's observation (a keen one at that) speaks to the stratified nature of North American societies. In Canada, where the hegemonic imagined ideal is White, Anglo, heterosexual, able-bodied and male, anyone who does not fit that imagined ideal is likely to experience discrimination, albeit to varying degrees depending on one's class and how one identifies with any of the various social demographic facets.

Being 'The Man'

Being male in a patriarchal society was at least one distinct 'advantage' enjoyed by participants. Yet, they had difficulty describing the role gender played in their lives when reflecting on their experiences. When participants supplied a response they often referred to disparities between men and women with respect to opportunities afforded in sporting contexts:

> Joel: I've never been too aware when it came to guy/girl, you know, when a girl is getting the short end of the stick, so to speak. 'Cause all my sports were male-dominated. Except ... if you compare the girl sports to the men's sports, the girls' sports don't get as much. They don't even get as much attention. So, I guess that's where I could see the gender difference.
>
> Junior: If I was a female this [i.e. getting a scholarship] wouldn't have happened 'cause, girls don't get that much play in fuckin' athletics and shit.

Whereas participants spoke explicitly about gender here, at various other points in our interviews they talked about being "the man"[57] and learning to be "tough" through the media or by participating in sport. Looking back, just fewer than half of the participants referred flippantly to these hegemonic masculine ideals.

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[57] 'The man' or 'the guy' is a term used to describe a highly skilled player, usually the star of the team, who receives adulation from fans – both on and off the court – and is akin to an archetypal alpha male.

> Kadeem:... I guess you being looked at as a guy in general in a society that you have to uphold this certain façade, like: 'You have to be a man; you have to be strong' or whatever.

Though they may be prescribed norms, participants noted that some of the ideas associated with 'manliness' were things they embodied growing up. Furthermore they acknowledged and appreciated those aspects of hegemonic masculinity that they felt contributed to their resilience in the face of adversity.

> Devon: You know going to school and competing every day, makes you, I guess more manly or more of a man, so I just prided myself on that when I was on the court and off the court, I'm just who I am.
>
> Junior: ... [M]e bein' a boy, helps a lot. 'Cause like, bein' around a bunch of boys, you're gonna be tough; gonna be a tough kid.
>
> Kadeem: I guess [gender] played a role in me being mature and growing up to be the individual that I am today; responsible and caring for others. It's just me knowing how to go through hardships and certain things. I don't know. I guess to become a man; ... I don't know how to answer that, bro. That's an interesting question.

Kadeem's comments exemplify the challenges participants had in answering my questions about the role of gender in their lives. I think the fact that participants could not easily provide an answer might also be related to patriarchy. Many institutions – sport being the most relevant here – in North America remain dominated by males and hyper-masculine ideals (e.g. toughness, hardness, competition, heterosexism)(see Abdel-Shehid 2005). These ideals are often deemed necessary to excel in sport and could explain why participants valued them. Moreover, being unable able to readily reflect on how gender influenced their experiences might be read differently as not *needing* to think about how gender influenced their experiences.

No regrets. It made me a better person.

Looking back across all of their experiences, participants described favourably pursuing, and playing on, US athletic scholarships. They had few regrets and if given the chance, there was little to nothing that they would change – from the joys and successes to the trials and tribulations. Interestingly, running throughout our conversations, participants made many references to fate or faith. Phrases such as "things happened for a reason" or "it was meant to be" were common. Sometimes these phrases would refer to a goal that they achieved after much hard work, for example when obtaining a scholarship.

> Chris: Everyone was happy for me [when I got a scholarship]. And [my friend] went the year before me. So it was just like: 'First [my friend]. Now me. That's the way it's supposed to happen. Cool.'

But often times such statements would follow their descriptions of a trying time in their life journeys.

> Kofi: I'm definitely not where I'm supposed to be. But not due to me, it's God's work; it's not mine.

Rationalizing such experiences that are outside of their control by referring to fate or faith may have been one way of understanding and making sense of their past or present experiences. Usually, participants would cite that their experiences made them 'stronger', 'toughen up' or 'become a better person'. As noted in Chapter 5, participants felt that the hard times they went through contributed to personal development and growth. And some described being surprised at all that they had accomplished, seeing their successes as – to paraphrase Chris' words – a combination of hard work and luck.

The resilience and persistence showed by participants in the face of considerable challenges could be evidence of aspirational capital (Yosso 2005, p. 77-78). If we consider community cultural wealth (e.g. aspirational, navigational, social capital) and other forms of capital (e.g. economic, cultural) as essential to the ability to successfully obtain scholarships and complete university degrees, it might lend insight into the reasons why some individuals 'stick it out', and why others do not[58]. As this thesis has shown, the participants had access to a large network of supporters who aided them in various ways (e.g., financial support, encouragement, athletic and academic development) to achieve their goals as youth, and young adults in university in the United States. Therefore, the persistence of participants might be seen less as simply 'hard work paying off' and more as individual will and determination, combined with a durable network of supporters that facilitate the realization of goals.

The life situations of participants after university might also be understood better through this prism. Support for the dream of participants to win scholarships was facilitated by the fact that, if a professional athletic career did not manifest, an athletic scholarship is balanced with the promise of upward social mobility through "free" education. Whether it was rhetoric or sincere direction, the necessity of obtaining an education appears to have been instilled in the participants.[59] As the possibility of making

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[58] As noted in Chapter 3, I was unable to find participants that left a US athletic scholarship. Future research may want to look at the roles of community cultural wealth, other forms of capital and habitus, in the ability to obtain an athletic scholarship and graduate from university.

[59] I cannot be sure whether or not the participants referred to the importance of education only retrospectively. It is quite possible that participants saw education as valuable, and described it as such, only after having already received their university degrees. Their responses may have differed had I

it to the NBA diminished, participants were forced to grapple with shifting their focus towards a new career path or at least preparing for one at the conclusion of a professional athletic career. And the academic requirements of an athletic scholarship enabled participants to see life beyond basketball. With their perspectives broadened, participants were encouraged to achieve grades which would at least enable them to get a post-secondary education and arguably have better chances at upward social mobility.

Conclusions

By combining Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction with Critical Race Theory, I have brought a more fulsome perspective to the pursuit of athletic scholarships by Canadian Black male youth. These theories aided me in retrospectively tracing the experiences of the research participants to reveal the ways race, class and gender were implicated in the practices in which they engaged, the capital available to them, and their individual dispositions. Indeed, in the sporting world, these interactions emerged as important for the ways participants perceived themselves, their life chances and the many other people with whom they interacted. This approach separates my work from previous research, which has not significantly engaged with race, and gender in the pursuit of US athletic scholarships.

What started out as a pastime for participants in this study, basketball was developed into a full-fledged passion. Influential people in their lives and the media contributed to making the pursuit of a US basketball scholarship an extraordinarily

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interviewed them when they were still pursuing a scholarship in high school, or while attending university. Nevertheless, the participants earnestly described recalling the importance of education when they were in high school and university.

meaningful goal. Notably, the economic, symbolic and cultural capital participants stood to gain were significant motivators to "go south". Though they came from across the GTA, participants applied strikingly similar strategies to fulfilling their goals. As this research has shown, obtaining a scholarship was far from being straightforward or easy. But their daily practices gave them the capital that they would need to make receiving a scholarship a reality. The meaning invested in the goal of winning scholarships became a source of both stress and joy for participants. Because there were so many variables to contend with, pursuing a scholarship was a rollercoaster ride of triumphs and defeats – both big and small. The first major peak in their lives was the attainment of athletic scholarships – a feat that gave the participants and their supporters immense gratification.

Their university experiences were equally tumultuous. Transplanted into a new context, the participants had to deal with a loss of social capital and a need to adapt and acquire new forms of capital (e.g. cultural, symbolic) in the various academic, athletic and social settings they encountered. Being a university athlete meant understanding that it was "a business" and, as scholarship athletes, more was asked of them – mentally, physically and emotionally – than any other time in their lives. As they negotiated their ways through university and the many new demands they faced, they eventually grew more comfortable and confident in their abilities to succeed. For most, success was framed as playing well and "getting the degree" as they re-assessed the likelihood of playing professional basketball in the NBA. College was understood as "an experience"

which helped them grow and mature in spite, rather, because, of the challenges they overcame.

Following university, participants either stepped out of or continued to embody the athletic ethos that had predominated throughout their lives. Taking stock of the capital available to them, and their life aspirations, participants decided to pursue meaningful careers. Giving back to their communities through mentorship and teaching was the best way that four of the participants could see to make use of their abilities and experiences. Three participants remained focus on "getting to the next level" and realizing their professional basketball career dreams even if not at the highest level. Both groups were optimistic for their futures and carving new career and life paths.

This research "puts on paper" some anecdotally well-known stories and adds to the small body of literature on Canadian athletes on US athletic scholarships (Carle 1999; Gilgunn 2007, Wells 2009). I have sought to advance the discussion in this area by detailing the particularities of the experiences of Canadian Black males. In addition I have suggested similarities consistent with previous findings, for example the development of "scholarship habitus" (Wells 2009) while pursuing a scholarship, and the challenges of balancing multiple and conflicting roles in university (see Adler & Adler 1991; Gilgunn 2007).

Moreover, I aimed to contribute to the limited amount of Canadian-focused sociology of sport research, which considers the importance of race. One of my central regrets in this research is not including White and other participants for comparison, and I

suggest future research should do so. Race matters, and I hope that this research sparks the interests of other Canadian sport researchers to think more critically about race and include it more centrally in their analyses. At the same time, this research points to the importance of considering "difference" within race, and being attentive to geographic and contextual specificities when using Critical Race Theory. The experiences of participants being marked as "Canadian" in American contexts suggests that, in future research, CRT theorists could incorporate ideas of diaspora and transnationality into their analysis when thinking through race.

While I have scratched the surface on gender further attention is required. Notably, the experiences of female athletes on US athletic scholarships should be an area of future research. Constructs of masculinity are pervasive in most sport settings, including for the participants in this study. Given the traditionally marginal space provided to women in sport, it would be interesting to know more about the ways women must negotiate the field of athletics when trying to attain US athletic scholarships.

In line with Gilgunn (2007), I would suggest future research should delve deeper into the "post-game" experiences of US scholarship athletes. Taking a retrospective phenomenological approach to this project allowed me to ascertain the ways participants understood and made meaning of their experiences. And this work has begun to address the ways former scholarship athletes think of how their high school and university experiences influence their current situations. But having a better sense of the lives

scholarship athletes lead might give us a better understanding of the ways their scholarship experiences affect social mobility and life chances.

I am often reminded that we live in a social world. Having a dense network of support played a significant role in the lives of these participants and their ability to obtain US athletic scholarships and university degrees. Further, developing the concept of community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005), especially social capital, would be useful to determine the ways people navigate inherently inequitable institutions.

Describing and interpreting the experiences of the participants in this research has been no small task. I have taken great pains to try and account for the many nuances in their experiences while still capturing the essence of what it is like to be a Canadian Black male pursuing, playing on, and eventually graduating from a basketball scholarship in the United States. My best intentions could not possibly capture all that this experience encompasses for the participants in this project. However, I am confident that continued research will serve to address any gaps I may have left.

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Appendix A – Literature Review Research Method

First, I selected key terms based on concepts in my research question[60]. These terms were assembled to compose a search string[61] to be applied across multiple databases. I conducted an "advanced search" joining key terms with the Boolean search tools "AND", "OR" and "()" to elicit the greatest amount of relevant results. ProQuest was selected from the York University library website to search 56 databases including pertinent education (ERIC, CBCA), psychology (PsychINFO) and sociology (Sociological Abstracts) databases. An initial search yielded 87 results. After limiting the search to exclude newspaper articles, magazines, trade journals and wire feeds I was left with 13 results. The search was further limited to include peer-reviewed sources leaving 5 results. However, to broaden my sources theses and dissertations were also included ultimately providing me with 13 results.

[60] How do Canadian Black male youth understand and make meaning of their experiences of having pursued and accepted an athletic scholarship to play basketball in USA post-secondary institutions and having returned to Canada?

[61] ((canad* OR Toronto)) AND all((Basketball OR (athlet* OR sport*))) AND all((U.S. OR America*)) AND "athletic scholarship*" AND (student* OR "student*athlete")

Appendix B – Interview Guide

1) Tell me about your schooling growing up (elementary, middle, high school)

Prompts:

- Courses that you took
- What your grades were like
- Aspirations at the time
- Parents' expectations
- Significance of athletics and academics in your life
    - Other activities
- Did you want athletics to be a significant part of your life after high school?
- What was your neighbourhood like?
- What was your family life like?

2) Tell me about your experience pursuing a US athletic scholarship.

Prompts:

- When did you start to think of pursuing/winning a US scholarship?
    - Canadian scholarship? Why or why not?
    - Why US? Why not Canada?
- How did you realize that you might have a chance at winning a US athletic scholarship? When did you realize this?
- What/who influenced you to pursue this goal? What were your motivations?
- How did you go about pursuing it? What steps did you take to realize this goal?
- What role did your PARENTS play in pursuing a scholarship? PEERS? COACHES? TEACHERS? OTHERS? (Women)
    - Did you get advice from others who had already been to the US on an athletic scholarship? What advice did they give you?
- What did it mean to you to pursue this goal?
- Generally speaking, how would you describe this experience?
- Why play basketball? (and not some other sport)

3) Tell me about the experience of winning a US athletic scholarship.

Prompts:

- Tell me about the recruiting process.
    - How many schools recruited you? US? Canadian?
    - What was the process like? (letters, meetings, phone calls, trips, promotional material)
    - Did recruiters/scouts make any promises or guarantees? "Perks"?
    - What did you think about the different approaches/styles of recruiting?
    - Were your parents involved in the recruiting process? How? How did recruiters interact with them? Were any other mentors/coaches/advisors involved?
- How did you decide which university to attend? What criteria influenced your decision?
- What did key people (e.g. family, mentors, friends, teammates, siblings) in your life think? Haters?
    - What influence did they have? What other input did you receive?
- What did winning a US athletic scholarship mean to you? The people around you?
- What was happening in your life when you decided to pursue this goal (family/friends, sports, school, financial)?
    - When you won the scholarship?
    - Could you afford to go to school without a scholarship?
    - How did scholarships/funding in Canada compare?
- How did achieving this goal make you feel?
- Why was the idea of university important?
    - Was it important? Why? (Or was university more just an avenue to play basketball?)

4) What was your school/academic experience like?

Prompts:

- What was the transition to university like?
    - How did things work logistically? (Getting there/travel, insurance, the scholarship contract, student visa, working?)
- What were classes like
    - What kind of courses were you taking?
    - Who selected the courses
    - Were you trying to taker easier or harder courses?
    - Do you feel like your were prepared for university academically
- What was it like at your university? Being Canadian? Being Black?
- How was your experience with the coaches? Players? Facutly? Non-athletes? Boosters/Alumni?
- What were practices like? Other activities?
- What were your educational goals? Career goals? Life goals?
    - Did these change? How? Why?
- Tell me about your experience of competing in the NCAA on a US athletic scholarship.
- Were there any "perks" associated with being a student-athlete?

5) Why did you return to Canada before you finished your degree?

OR

Why do you think you were able to finish your degree in the US?

Prompts:

- What events(s)/circumstances (academic, athletic, personal/familial, financial) led to you returning to Canada?
- What did you think about the way things unfolded?

OR

- Did you ever think about leaving?
- What things enabled you to complete your degree?

6) How do you feel about your accomplishments today?

Prompts:

- Are you where you want to be?
- What's missing?
- How would you describe your current situation?
- How would you describe your current involvement in sport?
- What are your current and future career and life goals?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10?
- How do you account for the way things unfolded for you/your experiences?

- What role do you thing race/gender played in your academic, athletic and career experiences and life in general?
- I'm interviewing black men specifically because I think blackness might have something to do with the pursuit of this dream. What do you think?
- Why did you choose to study in the US? Why not study in Canada? There are opportunities to be taken advantage of here, after all you're a Canadian.
    - Research has shown that many youth specifically black youth go to the states because they feel its easier there as a Black person because they feel there are better opportunities How does this apply to you? What are your thoughts on this?

- Do you know the experiences of others who went to the US?
- What advice would you give to others pursuing US athletic Scholarships?
- Is there anything further you would like to add?

1. Thank participant for his time and participation.

2. Remind participant that this interview will be kept strictly confidential.

3. Ask participant for permission to follow up regarding the interview via email and/or phone.

4. Ask if participant knows anyone else who I should talk to

Appendix C – Informed Consent

Date: September 17, 2012

Study Name: The Post-Game: Retrospectives of the Experiences of Canadian Black Student-Athletes on US Athletic Scholarships

Researchers: Desmond Miller, M.Ed. (Candidate). Prof. Carl James (Supervisor)
3150 Technology Enhanced Learning Building,
Keele Campus, York University
Desmond_miller@edu.yorku.ca 416 650-8458

Purpose of the Research The objective of this study is to explore and describe the ways that Canadian Black male youth understand and make meaning of their experiences of having pursued and accepted an athletic scholarship to play basketball in USA post-secondary institutions and subsequently returned to Canada without completing their degrees. The study involves the analysis of several in-depth interviews to provide a thoroughly detailed description of this experience. Data from this research will provide a fuller account of the potential consequences for Black youth in pursing a US athletic scholarship and will be useful for parents, students, coaches, teachers and other school officials. Information from my respondents will identify their successes and challenges of pursuing this dream as well as strategies for navigating various outcomes. This research will also contribute to the completion of my Master's degree requirements.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: Participants will participate in a semi-structured interview face-to-face, of approximately 60-90 minutes. Questions will relate to participants experience of pursuing, receiving and eventually leaving an athletic scholarship at a US post-secondary institution.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not foresee any risks involved in participating in this research greater than those encountered in aspects of your everyday life.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: You may appreciate your experiences being heard and contributing to research that brings attention to similar experiences shared by youth in your community.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your choice not to volunteer will not influence nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with me as the researcher, York University, or any other persons associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The interview will be audio recorded with a digital recorder and supplemented with handwritten notes. The interviewing or recording of the interview will not be associated with any identifying information. Your data will be safely stored on a password protected USB drive and computer in an on-campus office to which only I will access. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet at York University for 2 years, after which it will be destroyed by formatting the USB upon which the data are stored. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me either by telephone at (416) 650-8458 (work) or by e-mail (desmond_miller@edu.yorku.ca) or the Graduate Program in Education at 416-736-5018 or gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Professor Carl James at 416-736-2100 extension 20279 or cjames@edu.yorku.ca. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I_____, consent to participate in The Post-Game: Retrospectives of the Experiences of Canadian Black Student-Athletes Who Have Gone to the United States of America on Athletic Scholarships and Returned to Canada conducted by Mr. Desmond Miller. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Principal Investigator